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SC plea on poll facilities for Manipur displaced junked

Court not to interfere at this 'late stage' on 18,000 voters

NEW DELHI, 15 APR

Supreme Court on Monday refused to entertain a plea seeking voting facilities for around 18,000 people displaced internally due to the ethnic strife in Manipur for theLok Sabha elections.

The polling for the two Lok Sabha seats of Manipur will be held in two phases on 19 and 26 April.

A bench comprising Chief Justice DY Chandrachud and Justices JB Pardiwala and Manoj Misra said interference of this court, particularly at this belated stage, would cause substantial impediments in the conduct of the ensuing general elections of the Lok Sabha for Manipur.

"You have come at the last minute. At this stage, what can be virtually done? We cannot interfere at this stage," the bench said.

The top court was hearing a plea by Manipur resident Naulak Khamsuanthang and others seeking a direction to the Election Commission of India (ECI) to make arrangements to enable internally-displaced persons settled outside Manipur to enable them to cast their votes in the Lok Sabha elections by setting up special polling booths in the states where they are residing.

Manipur has been caught in a spiral of violence since May 2023. More than 160 people have been killed and several hundred injured since ethnic violence first broke out in the state on 3 May when a 'Tribal Solidarity March' was organised in the hill districts to protest against the majority Meitei community's demand for Scheduled Tribe (ST) status.

Though the number and intensity of incidents of violence are slowly ebbing away, many people are still living in relief camps far from their homes. —*PTI*

It was hearing a plea by a Manipur resident **PHOTO: PTI**

- Manipur has been caught in a spiral of violence since May 2023. More than 160 people have been killed and several hundred injured since ethnic violence first broke out in the state on 3 May when a 'Tribal Solidarity March' was organised.

BWSSB BLAMED

Youth dies, 2 hurt as bike falls into 20-ft pit

BENGALURU, 15 APRIL

A youth died and two were critically injured after the motorbike they were riding fell into a 20-foot pit dug for a water pipeline on SMV Road in Kengeri.

Saddam Hussain, 20, who was driving, died on the spot while Umraz Pasha, 25, and Mubarak Pasha, who was also in his twenties, were battling for their lives in hospital.

The accident occurred when the trio riding triples on a scooter failed to notice the pit, causing the vehicle to plunge into the excavation site, police said. Witnesses transported the injured to a nearby private hospital.

Some residents blamed Bengaluru Water Supply and Sewerage Board (BWSSB), for not securing the area around the pit. BWSSB had initiated work on laying a water pipeline under the Cauvery Stage V project. The board claimed that they had installed barricades around the pit.

Kengeri Traffic police have registered a case of negligence resulting in death against both Hussain and the BWSSB engineer concerned.

—*Salar News*

The accident occurred when the trio riding triples on a scooter failed to notice the pit **PHOTO: SALAR**

PHOTO: PTI

SC extends stay on survey of Shahi Idgah mosque

NEW DELHI, 15 APRI

The Supreme Court on Monday extended the stay on the operation of the Allahabad High Court order that allowed a court-monitored survey of the Shahi Idgah mosque complex adjoining the Krishna Janmabhoomi temple in Mathura. A bench of Justices Sanjiv Khanna and Dipankar Datta, meanwhile, posted for hearing in the week commencing 5 August a batch of petitions filed by the mosque management committee including the one challenging the 26 May, 2023 order of the High Court transferring to itself all matters related to the dispute pending before a Mathura court. In Mathura, a suit was filed in the court of Civil Judge Senior Division (III) for shifting the Shahi Idgah mosque, claiming that it was constructed on a part of the 13.37 acre land of the Shri Krishna Janmabhoomi Trust. The Hindu side had requested the High Court to conduct the original trial like it had done in the Babri Masjid-Ram Janmabhoomi title dispute. —*PTI*

Congress, DMK hid 'sin' on Katchatheevu: Modi

TIRUNELVELI, 15 APRIL

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Monday made a Tamil-centric pitch, reiterating setting up Thiruvalluvar centres and labeled Congress and DMK as "sinners" over ceding of Katchatheevu islet to Sri Lanka.

Outlining the features of his party's manifesto that was released on 14 April, he referred to Thiruvalluvar centres, bullet train in south India and promotion of pearl farming. Reiterating his commitment for Viksit Bharat, he said Viksit Tamil Nadu has become a mission in this election.

He was campaigning for BJP candidates Nainar Nagendran (Tirunelveli), Pon Radhakrishnan (Kanniyakumari) and Radhika Sarathkumar (Viruthunagar), besides ally John Pandian of the Tamizhaga Makkal Munnetra Kazhagam, who is contesting from Tenkasi (SC) on 19 April.

The party manifesto has given importance to Tamil language. Modi dubbed DMK and Congress, "anti-national" and said the entire country has now understood the "truth", that they had given Katchatheevu islet to another country (Sri Lanka) after "cutting it off" from Tamil Nadu.

He also accused DMK of insulting the legacy of late Chief Minister MG Ramachandran and said the Dravidian party had "ill-treated" late AIADMK matriarch J Jayalalithaa in the state assembly, alluding to the unruly scenes in the House in 1989.

Refuting the Opposition parties' allegations of "being sent to jail by BJP government", Modi said that the maximum numbers of cases registered by Enforcement Directorate are against those persons and entities that have no connection with politics. —*PTI*

Narendra Modi **PHOTO: PTI**

AMID HIGH TENSION

Iran allows officials to meet 17 ship crew

NEW DELHI, 15 APRIL

Iranian foreign minister Hossein Amir-Abdollahian has said that Tehran will "soon" allow Indian authorities to meet 17 Indian crew members of a cargo vessel that was seized by Iran's military near the Strait of Hormuz on Saturday.

Amir-Abdollahian conveyed this to External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar during a telephonic conversation on Sunday, according to an Iranian foreign ministry readout. It said Amir-Abdollahian also appraised details of Iran's "legitimate defence" and punitive measures against the Israeli regime, in a reference to Tehran's missile and drone attacks on the Jewish nation.

The Iranian foreign minister urged Indian government to maintain its active role through international bodies, including the United Nations Security Council, to halt the war in Gaza as it is at the core of the current crisis in the region, the readout said. The Indian foreign minister expressed concern about the situation of 17 Indian crew members and sought assistance from Iran in this matter, the Iranian statement said. India has been in touch with Iran to secure the release of the Indians onboard the container ship MSC Aries.

In its reaction, India called for immediate de-escalation of the situation and that its embassies in the region are in close touch with the Indian community in the region. —*PTI*

Mideast defence official shows a helicopter raid targeting a vessel near the Strait of Hormuz **PHOTO: AP/PTI**

India calls up Iran, Israel; says calm down

BENGALURU, 15 APRIL

India is very concerned over escalating hostilities between Iran and Israel and New Delhi has told the countries to "calm down," External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar said on Monday, amid spiralling tension in Middle East.

Iran carried out its first direct attack on Israel on Saturday in response to aIsraeli strike on its consulate in Damascus on 1 April. Jaishankar emphasised that the stability of the Middle East region was essential because about one crore Indian citizens live there. —*PTI*

>>>More on Page 2

Iran Prez to visit Pak on 22 April

ISLAMABAD, 15 APRIL

Amidst spiralling tensions in the Middle East, Iranian President Ebrahim Raisi is set to visit Pakistan on 22 April and hold meetings with Pakistan Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif, President Asif Ali Zardari and the military leadership, according to a media report on Monday.

The 63-year-old leader's expected visit will take place days after Tehran launched more than 300 drones and missiles.

The visit also assumes significance as it comes amidst ongoing efforts by Pakistan and Iran to deepen their cooperation which received a temporary setback earlier this year. United Kingdom Prime Minister said he would speak to his Israeli counterpart Benjamin Netanyahu to express solidarity and discuss how to prevent "further escalation". US Secretary of State Antony Blinken on Sunday reached out over phone to the foreign ministers of Jordan, Saudi Arabia, Turkey and Egypt. —*AP/BBC*

>>>More on Page 6

No SC relief for Kejri; sends notice to ED

NEW DELHI, 15 APRIL

Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal on Monday did not get any interim relief from the Supreme Court which sought a response from the Enforcement Directorate by 24 April on his plea challenging his arrest in a money-laundering case stemming from the alleged excise policy scam.

A bench of Justices Sanjiv Khanna and Dipankar Datta issued notice to the ED on Kejriwal's plea challenging the Delhi High Court's 9 April order that had upheld his arrest in the case.

The bench said the matter would be heard on 29 April.

Senior advocate Abhishek Singhvi, appearing for Kejriwal, questioned the timing of his arrest after the model code of conduct for the general elections had come into force and said it was done to disable him from campaigning. During the hearing, the senior advocate said the CBI and the ED have filed eight chargesheets in the excise case and Kejriwal had not been named in any of them. Singhvi said during this period, 15 statements, including nine by one person and six by others, were recorded and none of them named Kejriwal. —*PTI*

Court extends Kejri's custody to 23 April

A Delhi Court on Monday extended the judicial custody of Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal till 23 April in the money laundering case connected to the now-scrapped liquor policy. Kejriwal, who was arrested on 21 March, was produced virtually before Special Judge Kaveri Baweja of the Rouse Avenue Courts on the expiry of his judicial custody. —*PTI*

Arvind Kejriwal **PHOTO: PTI**

K Kavitha **PHOTO: PTI**

KAVITHA TO STAY IN TIHAR JAIL TILL 23 APRIL

NEW DELHI, 15 APRIL

A Delhi court on Monday sent BRS leader K Kavitha, arrested in connection with a corruption case linked to the alleged Delhi excise policy scam, to judicial custody till 23 April.

The daughter of former Telangana Chief Minister K Chandrashekar Rao was arrested from the Tihar Jail, where she was lodged after her arrest by the Enforcement Directorate (ED).

The CBI told the court that she was not required for further custodial interrogation. Advocate Nitesh Rana, representing Kavitha along with Deepak Nagar, opposed the police plea, saying the grounds were not sufficient to keep her in custody since she is no longer required for custodial interrogation. —*PTI*

THIS MONSOON

India to get above-normal rains

NEW DELHI, 15 APRIL

India will experience above-normal monsoon rains this season on the back of favourable La Nina conditions, the IMD said on Monday, bringing cheer to farmers and policy-planners.

M Ravichandran, the secretary in the Ministry of Earth Sciences, told a press conference that the seasonal rainfall will be on the higher side of 'above-normal', and pegged it at 106 percent of the long-period average (87 cm).

Parts of the country are already battling extreme heat and a significantly high number of heat wave days are expected in the April to June period. This could strain power grids, and result in water shortages in several areas.

The monsoon is critical for India's agricultural landscape, with 52 percent of the net cultivated area relying on it. It is also crucial for the replenishing reservoirs critical for drinking water apart from power generation across the country.

A prediction of above-normal rainfall during the monsoon season, therefore, comes as a huge relief to the fast-developing South Asian nation.

IMD chief said there is a 29 per cent chance of normal rainfall, 31 per cent chance of above-normal rainfall and 30 per cent chance of excess precipitation during the monsoon season.

According to IMD, rainfall between 96 per cent and 104 per cent of a 50-year average of 87 cm is considered 'normal'.

Positive Indian Ocean Dipole conditions, favorable for the Indian monsoon, are predicted during the season. Also, the snow cover in the Northern Hemisphere and Eurasia is low. Therefore, all the conditions are conducive, he said.

The first is El Nino, the second is the Indian Ocean Dipole (IOD), which occurs due to differential warming of the western and eastern sides of the equatorial Indian Ocean, and the third is the snow cover over the northern Himalayas and the Eurasian landmass, which also has an impact on the Indian monsoon through the differential heating of the landmass. —*PTI*

PHOTO: PTI

5 K'TAKA HC JUDGES GET PERMANENT POST

NEW DELHI, 15 APRIL

Five additional judges of the Karnataka High Court were on Monday elevated as permanent judges, the Law Ministry said. In a notification, the Department of Justice in the Law Ministry said Justices Cheppudira Monnappa Poonacha, Anil Bheemsen Katti, Chandrashekhar Mrutyunjaya Joshi, Umesh Manjunathbhat Adiga and Talkad Girigowda Shivashankare Gowda, the additional judges of the Karnataka High Court have been made judges in the same HC. In a separate notification, it said that Justice G Basavaraja, an additional judge, has been made additional judge of the Karnataka High Court for a "fresh term" of one year with effect from 16 August this year. —*PTI*

PHOTO: PTI (REPRESENTATIONAL)

Wild elephant tramples coffee grower to death

MADIKERI, 15 APRIL

A 63-year-old man died after he was attacked by an elephant in Srimangala Wildlife range of Kodagu district on Monday. According to forest officials, Aramanamada Madaiah, a coffee grower of Biruga village, went for a morning walk near a coffee estate and the elephant came from the opposite and attacked him. The incident occurred around 6.30am, an official said. Madaiah died on the spot. Soon after the incident, villagers staged a protest against forest officials for not taking action to reduce the wild elephant menace. The post-mortem has been done and a compensation amount of Rs 15 lakh has also been given to the deceased's family, he added. "Immediate steps have been taken to ensure the safety of people in the region and the elephant involved in the attack is being tracked," the officer said. An alert has been issued on the movement of elephants in the area. — *Salar News with PTI*

Complaint filed over ruckus at Tejasvi's event

BENGALURU, 15 APRIL

A complaint has been filed with Election Commission against a Congress candidate and some of her party workers for allegedly creating ruckus and heckling Bengaluru South MP Tejasvi Surya at an event here, his office said on Monday. A video of the alleged incident where Surya is seen exiting a venue amid chaos after he was allegedly heckled has gone viral on social media. The complaint was lodged by the organisers of the meeting of the cooperative sector representatives against Congress candidate for Bengaluru South (Sowmya Reddy) and her supporters, Surya's office said in a release. Surya is the BJP's candidate from Bengaluru South. According to the release, on 13 April, key representatives of the cooperative sector had organised a "meet and greet" with Surya at his election office. The representatives alleged in their complaint: "Individuals associated with the Congress party, without an invitation, forcefully entered the meeting and caused disruption." They demanded that FIRs be filed against the Congress candidate and her associates, and called for a thorough investigation into the incident. —*PTI*

Congress launches 'guarantee card' in Chamarajanagar

CHAMARAJANAGAR, 15 APRIL

Congress has resumed its 'Guarantee Card' campaign ahead of Lok Sabha elections in Chamarajanagar Lok Sabha constituency, despite objections from Opposition BJP and JD(S) who have expressed strong reservations against such voter incentives. The guarantee cards promise an annual financial aid of Rs 1 lakh to women from poor families and educated youth. Congress guarantees wage-first job opportunities and loan waivers for farmers. In total, five different guarantee cards are being distributed as part of the campaign. To obtain a guarantee card, women are required to provide details such as their name, Aadhaar card number, phone number. The initiative has drawn criticism from State Yuva JD(S) President Nikhil Kumaraswamy who recently approached High Court of Karnataka alleging that voters were being lured with guarantee cards during 2023 Assembly elections. Kumaraswamy expressed concerns that the use of modern technology to offer such incentives could compromise the impartiality of the election process. He requested Election Commission to intervene and ensure that such practices should not be repeated. —*PTI*

Bengaluru Suburban rail: SWR gives 115 acres for Corridor 4

BENGALURU, 15 APRIL

The Bengaluru Suburban Railway Project (BSRP) received a significant boost with the South Western Railway (SWR) allocating 115 acres for a crucial 46.88-kilometre stretch. This line will connect Heelalige in the south to Rajanukunte in the north.

The land handover comes under a lease agreement between SWR and Karnataka Rail Infrastructure Development Company Limited (K-RIDE), the body overseeing the 149-kilometer BSRP project. This development follows the finalisation of land agreements on 2 April, resolving a hurdle that had delayed construction on Corridor 4 (Kanaka Line).

K-RIDE awarded L&T Limited the contract to design and build viaducts for Corridor 4 in December 2023. However, the project awaited approval for the revised alignment plan and land acquisition from the railways. With the SWR approving the plan in January and finalising the land agreements, groundwork for Corridor 4 can now commence. Corridor 4, with its 19 stations, has a tight deadline of December 2026 for completion.

However, Corridor 1 (KSR Bengaluru-Devanahalli/ Airport, 41.4 km) awaits final approval for its revised alignment plan submitted by K-RIDE to the SWR. K-RIDE and the railways acknowledged that meeting December 2027 deadline set for Corridor 1, will be challenging. Split into two phases for faster execution, the Yelahanka-Devanahalli section is targeted for completion by December 2026, while the KSR Bengaluru-Yelahanka section has a December 2027 deadline. The estimated cost for the project is Rs. 15,767 crore.

—*Salar News*

The 46km line will connect Heelalige in the south to Rajanukunte in the north. ***(Representational Image: PTI)***

Cong files EC plaint over PM's Tukde gang remark

Modi accused Cong of trying to divide & weaken country

BENGALURU, 15 APRIL

- KPCC has urged poll body to take cognisance of the statements made by Modi and direct the authorities concerned to register a criminal case against him

Congress in Karnataka on Monday complained to Election Commission seeking legal action against Prime Minister Narendra Modi over his remarks at an election rally in Mysuru, in which he called Congress the 'Sultan of Tukde Tukde gang'.

Addressing a public meeting at Mysuru on Sunday, Modi accused Congress of harbouring the dangerous intention to "divide, break and weaken" the country.

In a letter to Karnataka Chief Electoral Officer, Karnataka Pradesh Congress Committee (KPCC) alleged that while addressing the rally, Modi said Congress and its allies had boycotted the Ram Mandir consecration in Ayodhya earlier this year, and accused the INDIA Bloc of wanting to "destroy the strength of the Hindu religion".

The PM said he "vowed not to allow" these "forces of hate" to succeed as long as he enjoyed the blessings of the people of India, the complaint said.

"The statement was made with an intention to woo the voters of India, in particular the voters of Karnataka, for the furtherance of the prospects of the election of the candidates of NDA group in India," it said.

KPCC has urged the poll body to take cognisance of the statements made by Modi and direct the authorities concerned to register a criminal case against him in accordance with the law in the interest of free and fair elections.

—*PTI*

PM Narendra Modi addresses an election campaign rally, in Mysuru on Sunday. ***PHOTO: PTI***

JAISHANKAR SPEAKS

'Trying to start US consulate in City'

BENGALURU, 15 APRIL

EAM S Jaishankar said on Monday that he is tracking the process of establishing a US consulate in Bengaluru and constantly reminding them.

Addressing a press conference in Bengaluru, Jaishankar said, "Certainly, when I come to Bengaluru, it's an achievement I should talk about. We are tracking the establishment of that consulate."

He said on the American side they have to go through a certain process where they have to resource it and get approval.

Jaishankar said he would like to visit the consulate on behalf of Prime Minister Narendra Modi because he made this request to US in his June last year visit.

Modi and US President Joe Biden discussed opening new consulates in each other's countries. The United States intends to initiate the process to open two new consulates in India in the cities of Bengaluru and Ahmedabad," the Ministry of External Affairs said in a press release.

Additionally, both affirmed a vision of India and the United States as among the closest partners in the world, a partnership of democracies looking into the 21st century with hope, ambition, and confidence.

"Our cooperation will serve the global good," the statement added. —*ANI*

IN REVERENCE

Bengaluru Central Congress candidate Mansoor Ali Khan pays tribute to iconic Kannada thespian Dr Raj Kumar during campaigning at CV Raman Nagar on Monday. ***PHOTO: MOHAMMED ASAD***

Congress files complaint with EC against HDK over women remarks

BENGALURU, 15 APRIL

Congress in Karnataka filed a complaint on Monday with Election Commission, seeking legal action against JD(S) leader HD Kumaraswamy over his comments that women in rural areas have "lost their way" due to the five guarantee schemes of Congress government in the state. The statement was made by JD(S) State president on Saturday at a public road show in Tumakuru.

In a letter to Karnataka Chief Electoral Officer, Karnataka Pradesh Congress Committee (KPCC) alleged that the statement was made by Kumaraswamy with the intention to "outrage the modesty of rural women" and to "woo male voters" of all the 28 Parlimentary constituencies of Karnataka.

The letter stated that Kumaraswamy's statement was also intended at furthering the prospects of BJP and JD(S) candidates in Karnataka, as women voters have been empowered to an extent thanks to the five guarantees and most female voters are showing interest in voting for Indian National Congress.

Congress workers protest against former CM HD Kumaraswamy over his statements, in Bengaluru on Monday. ***PHOTO: MOHAMMED ASAD***

HDK apologises

HDK apologised over his statement on women, says comment twisted. Kumaraswamy attacked Deputy Chief Minister DK Shivakumar accusing him of trying to blow up the remarks in a way which he did not mean, as he pointed out at comments made by Congress leaders against women.

"I express my regret to all the women of the State, if my mothers are hurt. Even when I spoke that day I addressed women as mothers." he said.

—*PTI*

'BJP WILL CRACK WHIP AGAINST ESHWARAPPA'

HASSAN, 15 APRIL

Karnataka BJP President BY Vijayendra said on Monday that the party would take disciplinary action against rebel leader KS Eshwarappa, who has decided to contest as an independent in Shivamogga Lok Sabha segment.

This is the first time the party has reacted on the issue. Vijayendra said his brother and Shivamogga MP BY Raghavendra will win the seat by over two lakh votes.

Eshwarappa who had also served as the party's State unit President, has entered the fray blaming Vijayendra and his father and veteran party leader BS Yediyurappa for his son KE Kantesh being denied the ticket to contest from Haveri Lok Sabha seat.

"The more he speaks, double the votes that will come in favour of Raghavendra," Vijayendra said here in response to the 75-year-old's allegation of Yediyurappa favouring his sons. —*PTI*

BENGALURU NORTH: KNOW YOUR CANDIDATE

Congress & BJP bank on changes for victory

The replacement of two-time MP DV Sadanand Gowda with Union Minister of State Shobha Karandlaje has intensified the contest in Bengaluru North constituency for Lok Sabha elections. Karandlaje is fielded against Congress' MV Rajeev Gowda, an academician and politician hailing from a family of freedom fighters.

MV RAJEEV GOWDA
INTERVIEW
By Vaishnavi Gopalraj

Q: What are your priorities for Bengaluru North, if voted to power?
A: Bengaluru North is the face of a new Bengaluru, where growth and progress will thrive. However, significant development is needed in the constituency, especially in the cultural sphere. While institutions like Ravindra Kalakshetra and Ranga Shankara are present in the central and southern parts of the City, the northern region lacks such amenities, with the only notable one being Chowdiah Memorial Hall. Addressing environmental concerns, improving water management and tackling traffic congestion are my priorities.

Q: If we look back at the history of 17 elections conducted in Bengaluru North, 12 elections were won by Congress, 4 by BJP and 1 by JD(S). Don't you feel Congress has lost its grip on the constituency since 2004?
A: Despite some setbacks and the (Narendra) Modi wave, it's important to recognise that Congress still holds a strong base in Bengaluru North. BJP replaced Gowda thinking that he has not done anything and Karandlaje has faced a 'go back campaign'. Despite four consecutive terms by BJP, little has been achieved, and it's time for a change. Caste will play its role but Congress' guarantees and BJP's failures will turn the tide in our favour this time.

Q: Your opponent Shobha Karandlaje will be tough competition for you
A: Observing Shobha in Parliament, it's evident that she is a determined fighter. However, her track record of igniting discord in a particular community is concerning.

Q: What are the problems you noticed in Bengaluru North and what changes are you trying to bring in?
A: I am committed to enhancing infrastructure, expanding the Metro network, and improving the quality of sports facilities in the area.

Q: What is your poll pitch to for the voters?
A: The key points are highlighting the achievements of State government, shedding light on the failures of BJP and voters thinking about the importance of thinking locally.

—*Salar News*

MV Rajeev Gowda
Age: 60
Party: Congress
Community: Vokkaliga
Education: PhD(Public Policy & Management), Wharton School, University of Pennsylvania, USA,
Assets: ₹49.7 crore
Native: Bengaluru
Criminal Charges: Nil

CHRONICLING THE JOURNEY:

- **1991:** Visiting scholar at Law School, University of California.
- **1992:** Assistant professor at University of Oklahoma
- **2000:** Moved back to India and joined as Prof at Indian Institute of Management Bangalore (IIMB) and led the India-Women in Leadership(i-WIL) programme to train women politicians.
- **2004:** Entered politics with Rahul Gandhi
- **2013:** Appointed AICC National Spokesperson
- **2014:** Nominated to Rajya Sabha

Q: What are your priorities for Bengaluru North, if voted to power? What is your poll-pitch
A: I appeal to the voters to place their trust in Prime Minister Narendra Modi and BJP. In the next five years, my focus will be on improving the lives of farmers, the poor, youth and women. My poll pitch would be to uphold the integrity and fight against corruption in both the State and the country.

Q: After 2004, Congress has not won any election in the constituency. Do you think Congress can stage a comeback this year?
A: My opponent Rajeev Gowda will give me a tough fight, I am not denying it. But, people will vote for BJP as we have a strong grip on the constituency. The coming together of BJP and JD(S) has increased our chances.

Q: Many among BJP have been sceptical about giving a ticket to you over two-time MP Sadanand Gowda. Do you think this has stirred disunity among the party?
A: No, there is no disunity in the party. Every worker will join me in the campaign. We have a strong presence in Yeshwanthpur, Dasarahalli and Mahalakshmi Layout.

Q: What are BJP's campaign strategies to reach out to more communities

SHOBHA KARANDLAJE
INTERVIEW
By Vaishnavi Gopalraj

and ensure that everyone's voices and opinions, especially youth, are heard?
A: I have launched an election campaign vehicle, which will visit every ward to focus on development initiatives. As promised, our work will be directed towards the welfare of the poor, women, and youth for the betterment of the constituency. Additionally, many youngsters support Modi, and they will vote for BJP.

Q: You stirred a controversy by stating that Tamilians were responsible for the 1 March blast at Rameshwaram Café. Your constituency has a sizable Tamil vote bank; do you think it will affect your prospects?
A: I have asked for forgiveness from Tamilians, and during the rally interaction, they expressed their belief in Modi. I don't believe there will be any impact on my vote bank. —Salar News

Shobha Karandlaje
Age: 57
Party: Bharatiya Janata Party
Community: Vokkaliga
Education: MA (Sociology) from Mysuru University
Assets: ₹13.88 crore
Native: Puttur, Dakshina Kannada
Criminal Charges: 3

- Booked for calling Kerala migrants "jihadi" elements
- Violated ban orders for visiting Chamundi Hills during Covid-19
- Booked for blaming Tamilans for cafe blast

CHRONICLING THE JOURNEY:

- **1998:** Joined BJP
- **2013:** Left BJP and joined BS Yediyurappa's KJP
- **2014:** Returned to BJP after KJP merged with it
- **2019:** Re-elected to LS
- **2021:** Minister for Agriculture
- **2023:** Minister for Food Processing Industries

EC seizes record ₹4,650cr before 1st phase of LS polls

EC made seizures of over Rs 100 cr every day since 1 March

NEW DELHI, 15 APRIL

Election Commission (EC) on Monday said authorities under its supervision have made seizure worth Rs 4,650 crore, including drugs worth Rs 2069 crore, in the run up to the Lok Sabha elections.

The poll panel said the seizures made since 1 March exceed the over Rs 3,475 crore recovered during the 2019 parliamentary polls.

The seven phased Lok Sabha polls were announced on 16 March. The first phase is on 19 April and the last one on 1 June. The Commission said authorities have been making seizures worth Rs 100 crore every day since 1 March.

Out of the total recoveries worth Rs 4,658 crore, the cash component stands at over Rs 395 crore, while liquor stands at more than Rs 489 crore.

Significantly, 45 per cent of the seizures are of drugs (Rs 2,069 crore).

Use of black money, over and above political financing, could disturb the level playing field in favour of more resourceful party or candidate, it noted, adding that the seizures are a critical part of its resolve to hold the Lok Sabha elections free of inducements and electoral malpractices and to ensure a level playing field.

Drug seizures accounted for approximately 75 per cent of the total seizures in January and February this year **PHOTO: PTI**

Drug seizures accounted for approximately 75 per cent of the total seizures in January and February this year and Mizoram.

Chief Election Commissioner, Rajiv Kumar, while announcing the polls last month, had underlined money power as one of the '4M' challenges, the poll authority recalled.

The poll panel pointed out that it has been taking action to ensure level playing field such as checking vehicles of prominent leaders and even removing officials for laxity in carrying out their mandate.

The Commission, it said, has also taken strict action against nearly 106 government servants who were found assisting politicians in campaigning, which is against various rules and ethics.

In the run-up to the polls, all district magistrates and superintendents of police were told to keep a strict watch on airfields and helipads. Such searches are taking place in airfields, both public and private, across the country to ensure inducements are not ferried by air, the said. *—PTI*

ELECTION INSIGHTS

Will Cong fight challenges to regain former glory?

Entering Lok Sabha poll fray after two successive defeats with its political image considerably dented, Congress faces a tough battle for survival as it fights a powerful BJP under Prime Minister Narendra Modi

HERE IS AN ANALYSIS OF CONG'S STRENGTHS, WEAKNESSES, OPPORTUNITIES AND THREATS

STRENGTHS

- Project itself as secular, all-inclusive party that fights for SCs, STs, OBCs and Muslims
- All-India caste census push hopes to woo OBCs—the biggest voter block
- Assures justice for all—the poor, oppressed, Dalits, farmers, youth and women
- Banks on 5 guarantees: Yuva Nyay, Bhagidaari Nyay, Naari Nyay, Kisan Nyay and Shramik Nyay
- Attacks BJP over price rise, unemployment and communal disharmony

WEAKNESSES

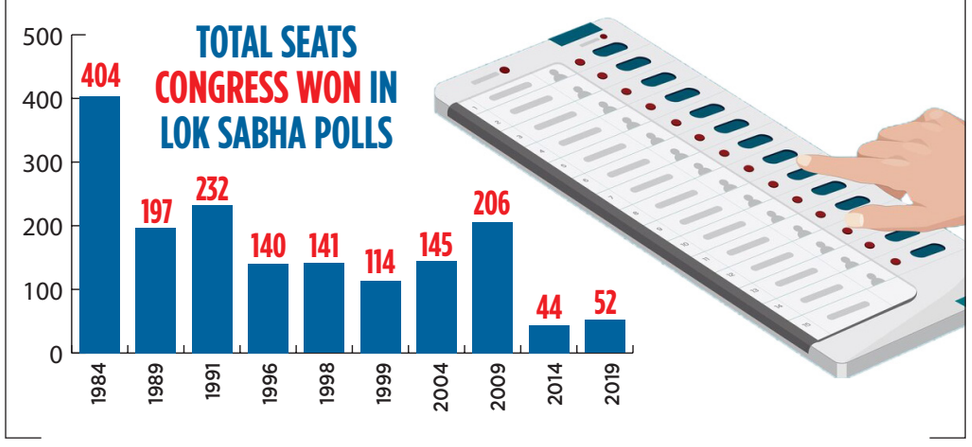
- Lack of introspection despite successive poll losses
- Several one-time loyalists have quit the party
- Its decision to decline to attend the Ram temple consecration, position on triple talaq ban, stand on Article 370 and CAA also led to questions
- The new generation has no consciousness of Cong's golden era under Nehru and Indira Gandhi while BJP has built its anti-Cong stand on UPA's decade-long rule "marked by corruption, nepotism and appeasement"
- A cash crunch following the freezing of bank accounts to the tune of Rs 225 crore and IT Department notices of Rs 3,567 crore

THREATS

- Modi's mass connect, and growing domestic and global profile may hit the party hard
- BJP continues to rise electorally as it has grown from 2 MPs in 1984 to 303 in 2019
- Regional parties fighting to retain core constituencies across states may scatter anti-BJP vote
- Simmering internal rumblings and inaccessibility of top leadership, with the Gandhis still in command and President Mallikarjun Kharge seen as their proxy
- The failure of INDIA bloc to put up a single candidate against BJP might affect electoral prospects

OPPORTUNITIES

- Congress will aim to consolidate anti-BJP vote building on Rahul's Bharat Jodo Yatras
- Will hammer BJP's "extortion racket" after electoral bond disclosure
- Seeks to gain from the BJP's decade-long incumbency by offering sops and freebies which powered it to victories in Himachal, Karnataka, and Telangana
- Unity among INDIA bloc presents a challenge and an opportunity for Congress



Centre's priority is to bring peace in Manipur, says Shah

Amit Shah says Congress wants to divide the country into North and South **PHOTO: PTI**

IMPHAL, 15 APRIL

Union Home Minister Amit Shah on Monday said that the BJP-led central government's priority is to establish peace in the ethnic strife affected Manipur.

This Lok Sabha election is between forces trying to break Manipur and those keeping it united, Shah said at a public meeting in Imphal.

He claimed that attempts of infiltration were being made in the northeastern state to change its demography.

"Establishment of peace in Manipur by taking all communities on board and without breaking the state is the priority of the Narendra Modi government," Shah said. At least 219 people were killed after ethnic clashes broke out in Manipur on 3 May last year, when a 'Tribal Solidarity March' was organised in the hill districts to protest against the Meitei community's demand for Scheduled Tribe (ST) status.

"Congress has an agenda to divide Manipur. But I want to say no one has the courage to divide Manipur," he said.

"This election is to make Modi the Prime Minister for the third time. This election is not between Congress and BJP but between forces who talk about breaking Manipur and who want to keep Manipur united," Shah said. He also said Communists gave guns to the youth while Modi ensured that they got access to gadgets like laptops for progress in their lives.

He said that wherever the Communists ruled, people did not even get the basics for life He alleged that Congress wants to divide the country into North and South.

—PTI

PM abandoned Manipur, alleges Cong

New Delhi, 15 April

Congress on Monday accused Prime Minister Narendra Modi of abandoning all responsibility for the "BJP-manufactured crisis" in Manipur and asked why is he "protecting" Chief Minister N Biren Singh. Congress general secretary Jairam Ramesh attacked BJP ahead of Home Minister Amit Shah's poll campaign engagements in the violence-hit state. "The Prime Minister has abandoned all responsibility for the BJP-manufactured crisis in Manipur. However, his Home Minister has found the time to campaign in the state today, and we hope he takes the initiative to answer a few questions on behalf of the PM," Ramesh said in a post on X.

—PTI

Motorist entangled in rope for PM's security dies

KOCHI, 15 APRIL

A motorcycle rider met with a tragic end after getting entangled in a rope that was tied across a major road here as part of security measures for Prime Minister Modi's visit, police said on Monday. Vaduthala resident, Manoj Unni, lost his life in the incident that happened at 10.30pm on Sunday. Police said Unni was taken to a nearby hospital but could not be saved. Meanwhile, his family said the rope was tied across the road without any warning and in the night it was difficult to identify it. "The rope was tied as part of the security arrangements for PM's visit. However, there was no ribbon or any reflective markers to make it visible at night," a relative said. Modi will be addressing two public meetings as part of BJP's campaign in Kerala. *—PTI*

SC rejects AAP MLA's anticipatory bail plea

NEW DELHI, 15 APRIL

Supreme Court on Monday refused to entertain AAP MLA Amanatullah Khan's anticipatory bail application in a money laundering case related to alleged irregularities in the Delhi Waqf Board during his chairmanship and ordered him to join the investigation. The money laundering case against Khan stems from a Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) FIR and three Delhi Police complaints. ED, which had conducted raids on the premises of the legislator, has claimed Khan acquired "huge proceeds of crime" in cash through illegal recruitment of staff in the Delhi Waqf Board and invested those to purchase immovable assets in the name of his associates. *—PTI*

Cops search Cong MLA's house in MP ahead of LS polls

CHHINDWARA, 15 APRIL

Police and excise personnel searched the residence and other premises of a tribal Congress MLA in Madhya Pradesh's Chhindwara district after a complaint of hoarding of cash and liquor but no such recovery was made, an official said on Monday. The opposition Congress, however, termed it as harassment of its tribal MLA Nilesh Uikey through misuse of power by the BJP government.

Superintendent of Police Manoj Khatri said following a complaint about hoarding of cash and liquor, a team of police and excise department personnel searched several places in Rajola Raiyat village on Sunday evening. But, the team returned after not finding anything at those places, he said. Legislator Uikey, said the police and excise team "raided" his house and agricultural fields at around 4pm on Sunday. *—PTI*

EC raps Tharoor for poll code violations

T'PURAM, 15 APRIL

Election Commission (EC) has found the statements by Congress leader Shashi Tharoor against BJP's Rajeev Chandrasekhar in a TV interview were unwarranted and violated the Model Code of Conduct (MCC) and warned him against making "unverified allegations" in future.

The "strict warning" from EC came on complaints by BJP's Election Legal Convener and the NDA's Election Committee Convener who had alleged that Tharoor had made unsubstantiated accusations against Chandrasekhar in an interview.

Tharoor, had denied the allegation against him and contended he had not mentioned Chandrasekhar or his party's name anywhere in the interview.

Shashi Tharoor **PHOTO: PTI**

He had also said his statement was only a general observation as told to him by people. Disagreeing with his claim, the EC said his contention was "untenable."

EC also directed the TV channel which conducted the interview "not to broadcast the impugned part of the interview till the MCC is in force."

—PTI

SHAHJAHAN SENT TO 14 DAYS CUSTODY

KOLKATA, 15 APRIL

A special PMLA court on Monday remanded suspended TMC leader Shahjahan Sheikh to 14 days' judicial custody in an Enforcement Directorate (ED) case for alleged money laundering in the garb of pisciculture business.

Sheikh was arrested by the ED on 30 March in connection with a case of mob assault on the agency's officials when they went to search his premises in Sandeshkhali in West Bengal's North 24 Parganas on 5 January in relation to another money laundering case. Sheikh, who spent the last couple of weeks in ED custody on a court order, was sent to judicial remand for 14 days by special judge Prasanta Mukhopadhyay, PMLA court, at Bichar Bhavan here. ED said it has arrested three associates of Shajahan Sheikh as part of a probe into the money laundering case. Shib Prasad Hazra, Sekh Alomgir and Didar Boksh Molla were taken into custody on 12 April, the agency said.. *—PTI*

Poll officials check RaGa's chopper in TN

NILGIRIS, 15 APRIL

Election officials on Monday conducted checks in a helicopter carrying Congress leader Rahul Gandhi. The flying squad officials conducted the search after the helicopter landed.

Gandhi was on his way to his parliamentary constituency, Kerala's Wayanad, where he has a slew of campaign activities, including public meeting.

Meanwhile, Rahul on Monday accused the ruling BJP at Centre of imposing the idea of "one leader in the country" and said it was an "insult" to the people of the nation.

PHOTO: PTI

He asked why India could not have more leaders and claimed that this line of thought is the main difference between the Congress and BJP. MP said Congress wants to listen to the people of the country and love and respect their beliefs, language, religion, culture. But, BJP wants to impose something from the top, he alleged.

Addressing a gathering during his road show in Kerala's Wayanad he said, his party's main fight is against "one nation, one people, one language, one leader" ideology of the RSS and Modi. BJP on Monday moved EC seeking action against Rahul for levelling "baseless" allegations against Modi that he wants to impose one language on the country and change the Constitution. *—PTI*

Arvind Kejriwal **PHOTO: PTI**

Kejri treated like terrorist: Mann after Tihar meet

NEW DELHI, 15 APRIL

Punjab Chief Minister Bhagwant Mann met Arvind Kejriwal in Tihar jail Monday and alleged he was being treated like a terrorist, even as AAP said its government in Delhi will start functioning from jail under a "proper format" with chief minister Kejriwal planning to meet two minister from next week.

Mann, who was accompanied by AAP Rajya Sabha MP Sandeep Pathak, said they met Kejriwal for half-an-hour but they were separated by a glass wall and had to interact over a phone call. "From next week, when the ministers meet, the government will start functioning from jail in a proper format," he said.

The BJP has been demanding Kejriwal's resignation since his arrest by the Enforcement Directorate on 21 March in an excise policy-related money laundering case. The Aam Aadmi Party and its ministers have, however, maintained that Kejriwal will continue to run the government from jail.

—PTI

SAYS RTI REPLY

'There is no provision for maintaining records under CAA'

KOLKATA, 15 APRIL

There is no provision under the Citizenship (Amendment) Act, 2019 and its rules, notified on 11 March, to maintain records of citizenship applications filed online under the law, according to an RTI reply by the Union Home Ministry.

The ministry's response came to RTI applications filed by Bangla Pokkho, an organisation that claims to work for the rights of Bengalis, seeking information on the number of people who applied for citizenship through the website provided by the Home Ministry on 12 and 13 March, the two days following the notification of the CAA rules.

PHOTO: PTI

"Further, as per the RTI Act, 2005, CPIO is not authorised to create information. Hence the information sought may be treated as NIL," said the communication. PTI possesses a copy of the communication disbursed by the Foreigners Division (Citizenship Wing) of the Home Ministry. The RTI applications were filed by Md Sahin of Bangla Pokkho.

"Such a response is ridiculous given that all CAA applications are made online and are centrally digitised," said Garga Chatterjee, general secretary of Bangla Pokkho.

Chatterjee claimed that the people may be reluctant to apply due to the mandatory requirement to declare under affidavit the applicant's country of origin and upload it on the website with documentary evidence. *—PTI*

PHOTO: PIXABAY

2 children die after being hit by train in Bareilly

BAREILLY, 15 APRIL

Two children died after being hit by a train while trying to retrieve a kite stuck on a railway pole here, police said on Monday. The incident happened on Sunday evening when Faiz,12, and Sajid,8, were trying to get hold of a kite stuck on a railway pole between Maheshpur Atria, within the CB Ganj police station area, and Milak Rotha village, under the Qila police station area. Both the children died on the spot, the police said. Around 7pm on Sunday evening, the CB Ganj police station received information that two children had been hit by a train while trying to retrieve a kite from a pole on the railway line passing between Maheshpur Atria and Rotha Milak village, Inspector RPF Manoj Kumar said. He added that train movement along the line has not been hampered. The police said legal action has been taken into the matter and the families of the deceased have been informed.—*PTI*

Man kills his 3 kids by throwing them into well

JALNA, 15 APRIL

A man allegedly killed his two daughters and 12-year-old son by throwing them into a well in a village in Maharashtra's Jalna district, police said on Monday. The accused, Santosh Dhondiram Takwale, was arrested on Sunday after he called up the police to inform them about the deaths, an official said. Takwale allegedly threw his son Soham and daughters Shivani,8, and Dipali,7, into a well in Domegaon village in Ambad tehsil on Saturday, he said.The deceased were Takwale's children from his first wife, who died, and he had remarried, inspector Raghunath Nachan of Ambad police station said. A case has been registered, and a probe is on, he said. —*PTI*

2 farmers killed, 3 injured as truck hits tractor-trolley

VIDISHA, 15 APRIL

Two farmers were killed and three others injured when a truck hit their tractor-trolley in Madhya Pradesh's Vidisha district in the early hours of Monday, police said. The accident took place near a warehouse on Vidisha-Sagar road under Tyonda police station limits at around 3am. The farmers had gone to sell their crop produce at the warehouse, Tyonda police station in-charge ML Bhati said. A speeding truck hit the stationary tractor-trolley. Two farmers, both brothers, were killed, he said. Three other farmers received injuries and were undergoing treatment in a hospital, the official said. The truck driver and helper fled the spot, he said.—*PTI*

Cab driver shot dead in road-rage near Red Fort

NEW DELHI, 15 APRIL

A 36-year-old cab driver was killed while a beggar was shot at in an alleged road-rage incident near the Red Fort, police said here on Monday. According to the police, they received an information from the LNJP Hospital at 1.50am on Monday that Mohammad Sakib, a resident of Zakir Nagar was admitted there after receiving gunshot wounds along with a teenager named Luv Khush,15, a resident of Palwal. "After the PCR call, immediately a team was rushed to the spot. Later, we got information that during treatment, Sakib, who had suffered a gunshot injury on his abdomen, died," Deputy Commissioner of Police (North) MK Meena said. The officer said that the cab had allegedly hit an e-rickshaw which led to an altercation between the driver and the e-rickshaw driver.—*PTI*

India slams Lancet report on healthcare spending

Report said Indian healthcare deteriorated under Modi govt

NEW DELHI, 15 APRIL

Central government claims the budget estimates of the Department of Health and Family Welfare have reached Rs 86,175 crore in 2023-24 *PHOTO: PTI*

After a Lancet report that asserted that the Indian government spends just 1.2 per cent of GDP on healthcare and noted that it was among the lowest among G20 countries, sources in the government said that spending is at an all-time high and out-of-pocket expenditure as a per cent of the total health expenditure has decreased.

"As per the National Health Policy, 2017, public investment in health is envisioned to reach 2.5 per cent of GDP by 2025. Ministry of Health and Family Welfare (MoHFW) has taken up with States to prioritize allocation to the health sector and enhance their health budgets by at least 10 per cent every year to reach the goal as envisaged," one of the sources said.

The budget estimates of the Department of Health and Family Welfare have reached from Rs 86,175 crore in 2023-24 from Rs 36,948 crore in 2014-15, thereby showing an overall increase of 133.23 per cent during the period, they said.

According to the report by medical journal Lancet, the government spending on health has fallen and now hovers around an "abysmal" 1.2 per cent of gross domestic product, out-of-pocket expenditure on health care remains extremely high, and flagship initiatives on primary health care and universal health coverage have so far "failed" to deliver services to people most in need.

In response, the sources in the government said the Health Ministry is making continuous efforts to increase allocation in health budget.

Further, the 15th Finance Commission has provided Rs 70,051 crore as grants for health through the local governments, the sources added.

As per National Health Accounts estimates for 2019-20, the key achievements in the health sector, that the total health expenditure was Rs 4,83,259 crore in 2014-15, which in 2019-20 has risen to Rs 6,55,822 crore.However, government health expenditure as a per cent of GDP has increased from 1.13 per cent in 2014-15 to 1.35 per cent in 2019-20, indicating the commitment of the government to increase investments in the health sector.On out-of-pocket expenditure, they said it has been decreasing."Out-of-pocket expenditure (OOPE) as a per cent of total health expenditure has decreased to 47.1 per cent in 2019-20 from 62.6 per cent in 2014-15. —*ANI*

SUMMER ARRIVES IN FORCE

IMD warns of heatwave across multiple states

NEW DELHI, 15 APRIL

As summer arrives in full force, the India Meteorological Department has forecast a heatwave in several regions, including North Goa, Telangana, Andhra Pradesh, and West Bengal.

The India Meteorological Department (IMD) has alerted Mumbai and several other regions in Maharashtra about impending heat conditions on 15 and 16 April, 2024. The department forecasts maximum temperatures ranging from 36 to 38 degrees Celsius for Mumbai, Raigad, and Thane, issuing a heatwave warning for these areas.

In North Goa, heat wave conditions are predicted to prevail on the 15th and 16th of April, 2024. Similarly, Odisha is likely to witness intense heat wave conditions from the 15th to the 19th of April, posing significant challenges for residents and authorities alike.

Telangana is also bracing for high temperatures, with isolated pockets expected to face heat wave conditions on the 17th and 18th of April. Coastal Andhra Pradesh & Yanam are not far behind, as heat wave conditions are anticipated from the 16th to the 18th of April, prompting concerns for the well-being of inhabitants.

Gangetic West Bengal is also on high alert, with heat wave conditions very likely in isolated pockets from the 17th to the 19th of April, adding to the growing list of regions facing extreme weather conditions.

Additionally, yellow alert has been sounded for several districts in Kerala where temperatures are expected to reach unprecedented heights. According to meteorological reports, the mercury is expected to soar to 36°C in Thiruvananthapuram, surpassing the normal range by 2 to 4 degrees Celsius, from 15th to 17th April, 2024. The warning extends across various districts, with Kollam, Thrissur, and Palakkad expected to experience temperatures around 39°C, while Kozhikode and Kannur may see highs of 38°C. Alappuzha, Pathanamthitta, Kottayam, Ernakulam, and Kasargod are also likely to hit around 37°C. —*ANI*

Cops question owner of vehicle used in firing outside Salman's home

MUMBAI, 15 APRIL

A group of gunmen started firing outside actor Salman Khan's house on Sunday *PHOTO: PTI*

The police are questioning the owner of the motorcycle allegedly used by unidentified people in the firing outside Bollywood superstar Salman Khan's house in suburban Bandra here, an official said on Monday.

The motorcycle, which was abandoned near Mount Mary Church, a little over a kilometre from the actor's house, was registered in the name of a man living in the Panvel area of Navi Mumbai, the official said.

The man had recently sold the two-wheeler to someone else, assistant commissioner of police Panvel Ashok Rajput said. One of the two men seen in a CCTV footage opening fire outside Bollywood superstar Salman Khan's house in Mumbai is suspected to be from Gurugram, sources in the Delhi Police said on Sunday.

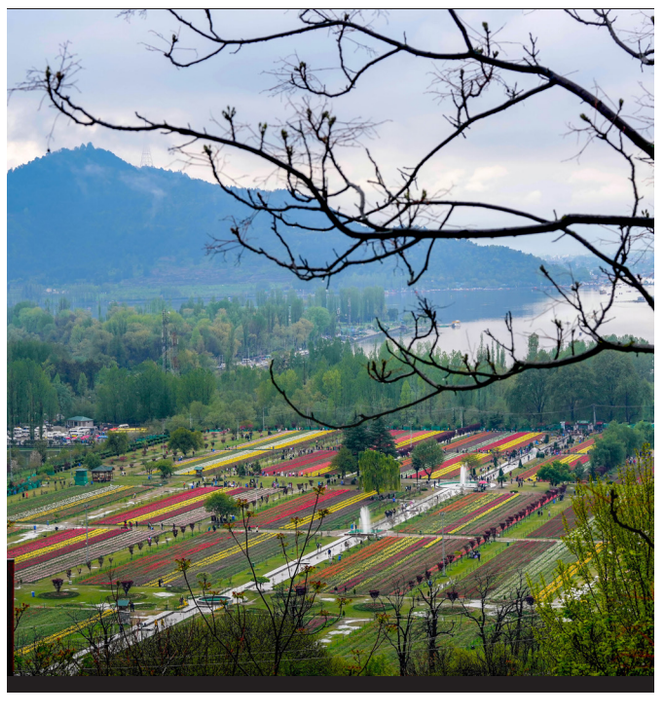
Two people fired four rounds outside Bandra's Galaxy Apartments, where the actor resides, around 5am and fled from the spot.

According to officials, the suspects abandoned the vehicle near the church, walked some distance and took an autorickshaw to Bandra railway station.

They boarded a train going towards Borivali but alighted at Santacruz railway station and walked out, they said.

The police are questioning several other people and recording their statements, he said, adding that the CCTV footage from the area is also being examined. The police have formed more than a dozen teams to probe the incident, and some have been sent to Bihar, Rajasthan and Delhi, the official said. —*PTI*

TULIP BLOSSOMS



Tourists visit the Indira Gandhi Memorial Tulip Garden, Asia's largest tulip garden, in Srinagar, on Monday *PHOTO: PTI*

WB: EC ORDERS DIG'S REMOVAL POST VIOLENCE

NEW DELHI, 15 APRIL

The Election Commission on Monday ordered the removal of the Deputy Inspector General of Police (DIG) of Murshidabad in West Bengal over violence in the district and the officer's alleged "lack of supervision" to immediately prevent more incidents, according to sources.

They said two violent incidents were reported there in which weapons and explosives were used.

The sources said IPS officer Mukesh, who is DIG, Murshidabad Range, in the rank of IGP, is being removed.

While visiting the state ahead of announcing the Lok Sabha polls, the Commission had said there will be zero tolerance for election violence and that responsibility will be fixed at "higher levels", the sources said.

Violence was reported in the high-profile constituency on Eid where rival TMC groups allegedly hurled bombs at each other.

Senior Congress leader Adhir Ranjan Chowdhury, former India cricketer Yusuf Pathan from TMC and Gouri Shankar Ghosh of BJP are in the fray in the constituency. —*PTI*

- The sources said IPS officer Mukesh, who is DIG, Murshidabad Range, in the rank of IGP, is being removed. The Commission had said there will be zero tolerance for election violence

SC adjourns bail plea of NewsClick founder

NEW DELHI, 15 APRIL

The Supreme Court on Monday adjourned the medical bail plea of Prabir Purkayastha, Newsclick founder and Editor-in-Chief, lodged in Tihar jail under anti-terror law, for 22 April.

A bench of Justices BR Gavai and Sandeep Mehta adjourned to next Monday the plea of Purkayashta, seeking bail on medical ground, as senior advocate Kapil Sibal representing him was unavailable.

Earlier, the apex court had directed the All India Institute of Medical Sciences (AIIMS) to set up a medical board to examine the health condition of Purkayastha.

It had asked the AIIMS director to constitute the board and submit a report which shall also consider the jail records and complete medical history of the petitioner.

The direction of the apex court came after Sibal told the bench that the report filed by the prison authorities about his client's medical condition was not correct. Purkayastha had earlier also approached the Supreme Court challenging his arrest under the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act (UAPA) over alleged Chinese funding to promote anti-national propaganda. He challenged the Delhi High Court's order upholding the trial court order remanding him to police custody. —*ANI*

'Delhi's airport among world's top 10 busiest'

NEW DELHI, 15 APRIL

Delhi airport has been named among the world's top 10 busiest airports for 2023 in a list topped by Hartsfield-Jackson Atlanta International Airport. The Indira Gandhi International Airport in the national capital is ranked tenth while Dubai and Dallas airports are at the second and third positions, respectively, according to the Airports Council International (ACI) World.

Releasing the list on Monday, the ACI also said the global total passenger forecast for 2023 stands close to 8.5 billion (850 crore), reflecting a remarkable recovery of 93.8 per cent from pre-pandemic levels and 27.2 per cent higher than 2022.

"Notably, international traffic recovery drew nearer to that of domestic traffic, emphasising its essential role in propelling the industry's resurgence and expansion," it said.

Among the top 10 busiest airports, five are in the US.

At the tenth place, Delhi airport handled more than 7.22 crore passengers in 2023. In 2022, the airport was at the ninth position.

Hartsfield-Jackson Atlanta International Airport is on top and it handled over 10.46 crore passengers last year. It is followed by Dubai Interntional Airport, which saw more than 8.69 crore passengers, and Dallas Forth Worth International Airport. The latter handled over 8.17 crore passengers in 2023.

Others in the list are London's Heathrow airport (4th spot), Tokyo's Haneda airport (5th), Denver International Airport (6th), Istanbul airport (7th), Los Angeles International airport (8th) and Chicago's O'Hare International Airport (9th). —*PTI*

- The Indira Gandhi International Airport in the national capital is ranked tenth while Dubai and Dallas are at the second and third

SC plea seeks review of electoral bond scrapping

NEW DELHI, 15 APRIL

A plea has been filed in the Supreme Court seeking review of its 15 February verdict, which had scrapped the Modi government's electoral bonds scheme of anonymous political funding.

The review plea filed by advocate Mathews J Nedumpara submitted that this Court entertained the petition (against the scheme) and struck down the law and the scheme without noticing that in doing so it is acting as an appellate authority over Parliament, substituting its wisdom on a matter which falls in the exclusive province of legislative and executive policy.

"The court failed to notice that even assuming the issue is justiciable, the petitioners therein having not claimed any specific legal injury exclusive to them, their petition could not have been decided as if a private litigation for the enforcement of rights which are specific and exclusive to them," Nedumpara submitted in his plea.

He said the Court failed to notice that the public opinion could be sharply divided and the majority of the people of this country could probably be in support of the scheme, brought into existence by their elected representatives and that they too have a right to be heard. —*PTI*

EX-JUDGES WRITE TO CJI

'Undermining of judiciary must stop now'

NEW DELHI, 15 APRIL

The retired judges accused the critics of having insidious methods to sway judicial processes *PHOTO: PIXABAY*

A group of 21 retired judges of the Supreme Court and High Courts have written to the Chief Justice of India on the escalating attempts by "certain factions to undermine the judiciary through calculated pressure, misinformation, and public disparagement".

These critics are motivated by narrow political interests and personal gains and are striving to erode public confidence in the judicial system, they said.

Though the retired judges, including four from the apex court, did not specify the incidents which prompted them to write to the CJI, their letter came amid amid a war of words between the ruling BJP and opposition parties over the actions against some opposition leaders in corruption cases.

With affected leaders and their parties moving courts to seek relief, the BJP has often accused them of using judicial decisions selectively and cited any lack of relief for several arrested leaders to rebut the opposition's criticism.

The retired judges, including justices (retired) Deepak Verma, Krishna Murari, Dinesh Maheshwari and MR Shah, accused the critics of having insidious methods with clear attempts to sway judicial processes by casting aspersions on the integrity of courts and the judges.

"Such actions not only disrespect the sanctity of our judiciary but also pose a direct challenge to the principles of fairness and impartiality that judges, as guardians of the law, have sworn to uphold," they said in the letter titled "Need to safeguard judiciary from unwarranted pressures".

The strategy employed by these groups is deeply troubling, ranging from the propagation of baseless theories intended to malign the judiciary's reputation to engaging in overt and covert attempts to influence judicial outcomes to their favour, they said.

"This behaviour, we observe, is particularly pronounced in the cases and causes of social, economic and political significance, including the cases involving certain individuals, wherein the lines between advocacy and manoeuvring are blurred to the detriment of judicial independence," they added.

The letter writers said they are particularly concerned about the tactics of misinformation and the orchestration of public sentiment against the judiciary. —*PTI*

CHAITI CHHATH FESTIVAL

Vehicles stuck in traffic jam, on the last day of 'Chaiti Chhath' pooja, near Digha Ghat area in Patna, on Monday
PHOTO: PTI

Before elections, Instagram boosts Modi's AI images

VIOLATION OF POLL CODE

AI image created by Right-wing boosted as political advertisement garners more than 35,000 impressions ***PHOTO:PTI***

- Hokage Modi Sama promoted nearly 50 pieces of AI-generated images of Modi, making it the leading advertiser of AI-generated Modi images on Instagram

In early March, a realistic AI-generated image of Prime Minister Narendra Modi, styled as Bhishma Pitamah from the ancient Hindu epic Mahabharata, was boosted as a political advertisement on Instagram.

With long wavy grey hair, a sun-shaped mark on his forehead and donning body armour, the image depicted what Modi fans see as his role in today's world: a reincarnation of supreme commander Bhishma who fought against foreign threats.

This Instagram image, created by the Right-wing page Hokage Modi Sama and first posted in 2023, was boosted as a political advertisement for two days in March, garnering more than 35,000 impressions.

An review of Meta Ad Library data of political advertisements in India over the past three months revealed that, between 27 February and 21 March, Hokage Modi Sama promoted nearly 50 pieces of AI-generated images of Modi, making it the leading advertiser of AI-generated Modi images on Instagram.

The Meta Ad Library is a public archive that hosts a collection of political advertisements run on its platforms, which include Instagram and Facebook.

The common theme across all the images shared by the handle was the valorisation of Modi as a Hindu leader.

Popular AI images boosted through sponsored posts on Hokage Modi Sama feature Modi as a reincarnation of Bhishma, a suit-wearing son of god, embracing Hindu heritage and the King of Hindu Rashtra settled on his throne, garnering millions of likes and views. (Hindu Rashtra is the contentious ideology of a Hindu-majoritarian rule of India, a move away from its secular founding principle.

"Through these images, the attempt appears to be to impart a simultaneous sage-like and warrior-like quality to Modi, both of which create the aura of a political leader who is indefatigable, undefeatable, beyond reproach and thus worty," Amogh Dar Sharma, a lecturer at the University of Oxford who studies political communication, said.

But the posts by the most prolific online advertiser of Modi's AI images also show the challenges with enforcing AI-related rules on social media, amid fears of manipulated images being leveraged for propaganda among voters who might not fully understand the extent of alteration that photos and memes could have gone through.

Meta is aware of such use and before a crucial 2024 election year, it announced that starting January, political advertisements on Instagram and Facebook created using artificial intelligence will be required to disclose the use or risk getting banned. Gandhi's fake image with farmers was accompanied by the caption: "Rahul Gandhi empathizes with farmers, promising unwavering support and a commitment to addressing their concerns individually." The sponsored post contained the hashtags #aigenerated and #aiimages, indicating they were AI-generated, and had an estimated 7,000 impressions.

West vs Global South

There is also a disparity in the way platforms in the West and the Global South are tackling the trend of AI images ahead of elections.

For instance, to mitigate the potential abuse of AI images ahead of the November US presidential elections, popular AI image-generator Midjourney banned the creation of fake President Joe Biden and Donald Trump images in March.

But there have been no such steps in India, raising "concern regarding the equitable platforms across different regions", Baybars Orsek, the managing director of Logically Facts, said. Logically Facts is part of Meta's third-party fact-checking programme, and part of the misinformation combat alliance in India.

Attempts to generate AI images on Midjourney of Modi and Gandhi shaking hands were successful, while the prompt to generate an image of Modi and Trump shaking hands resulted in a "Banned Prompt Detected" notification.

"This decision brings to light the disparities in how such moderation policies are applied globally, especially in the context of the Global South, including countries like India, which is heading into the most significant election of the year," Orsek said.

It is similar to how social media companies such as Facebook or Twitter policies to keep their platforms safe are skewed towards the West and often neglect perspectives from the Global South, added the IFF's Waghre.

—Al Jazeera

SALAR

Acidification might lead to loss of 3.3 billion tonnes of soil

Soils are turning acidic due to industrial activities and intense farming in India ***PHOTO:PIXABAY***

Over 30 per cent of cultivable land in India is said to carry acidic soil, impacting plant growth. Now, a new study highlighted another concern: Loss of soil inorganic carbon, a stable carbon pool. This depletion could hurt the health of soil and its ability to regulate nutrient levels, foster plant growth and store carbon.

Soils are turning acidic due to industrial activities and intense farming. In India, soil acidification might lead to loss of 3.3 billion tonnes of soil inorganic carbon (SIC) from the top 0.3 metres of its soil over the next 30 years, according to the study published in the journal Science.

The latter, which plays a role in nutrient cycling, is the main component of soil organic matter such as plant and animal waste, microbes and microbial byproducts.

Together, soils store more than thrice the quantity of carbon in vegetation or double the quantity of carbon in the atmosphere.

Soil acidification is already a concern in the country, affecting about 48 million hectares (mha) out of 142 mha of arable land.

Acidic soils in India are widespread in the humid southwestern, northeastern and Himalayan regions. The northeastern region, in particular, has recorded acidity in approximately 95 per cent of the soils.

This is worrying because acidic soils affect crop growth and productivity by reducing the availability of plant nutrients. It also predisposes plants to other biotic and abiotic stress factors.

Low pH levels (acidic soils) dissolves solid carbonate and removes it either as carbon dioxide gas or releases them directly into the water.

So far, the focus has largely been on SOC, recording more than 96 per cent of publications and citations, while SIC is neglected, with only 4 per cent share in global soil carbon research, according to a 2024 study published in Geoderma journal.

So the team from the United States, Australia and France created a global SIC database containing 223,593 measurements of 55,077 soil profiles from site studies.

Changes in the environment, especially soil acidification, could affect this pool. The team found that India and China are likely to be the most affected in future scenarios.

This study, Huang added, only looks into the nitrogen fertilisation and deposition (example, acid rain)-induced soil acidification for the future period.

He called for a further assessment of a large number of samples that measure soil pH coherently through time and space in India.

The large SIC pool revealed through this study and its high vulnerability to acidification-induced losses may pose a risk to limiting net carbon dioxide emissions to the atmosphere in line with the Paris Agreement goals.

Further, every year, approximately 1.13 billion tonnes of inorganic carbon are lost from soils to inland waters. This loss could have overlooked implications for carbon transport between the land, atmosphere, freshwater and ocean, the researchers warned.

As SIC is important for soil health, ecosystem services and functions along with carbon sequestration, the team hopes to see it incorporated into climate change mitigation strategies for maintaining and enhancing carbon storage.

Going forward, the team hopes to find answers to questions such as what happens to the lost inorganic carbon — do they relocate into deeper soil layers, enter the atmosphere as carbon dioxide or find their way into rivers, groundwater and oceans?

We also need to study practices that can mitigate the negative impacts of agriculture practices on soil inorganic carbon while enhancing crop yields to support the growing population in the future, Huang added.

—Downtoearth

Acidic soils in India are widespread in the humid southwestern, northwestern, and Himalayan regions. Northeastern region has recorded acidity in 95 per cent of the soils ***PHOTO:PIXABAY***

LETTERS

Write to us at salar@salar.news

Assam Rifles report accuses Manipur CM of inflaming conflict

Ngangbam, other members of the Arambai Tenggo pose with Chief Minister Biren Singh in June 2022
PHOTO:FACEBOOK/ KOROUNGANBA KHUMAN

On Christmas Eve, it was eerily calm inside a makeshift bunker with piles of gunny bags and a tin roof. Hunkered inside and clutching their single-barrelled rifles, 19-year-old Chonminlal Kipgen and 26-year-old Paolal Kipgen from the predominantly Christian Kuki-Zo community looked out and scoured the hills of Kangpokpi district for armed fighters from the rival Meitei community.

They said they were village volunteers – civilians who had taken up arms to defend their homes.

Not so far away in Manipur's capital, Imphal, the majority-Meitei community had similarly muted celebrations during their most cherished festival, Ningol Chakouba, in early November.

For the past 11 months, the two communities Manipur have been locked in what is arguably the country's longest-running ethnic conflict.

The conflict has killed 219 people, injured 1,100 and displaced 60,000. It has revived an array of armed groups, sweeping up men and boys as recruits from both communities. On Saturday, two Kuki-Zo "village volunteers" were killed and their bodies allegedly mutilated in Manipur's Kangpokpi district.

While the Kuki-Zo communities are almost entirely Christian, the Meitei community predominantly follows a syncretic form of Hinduism and their own Indigenous faith system, called Sanamahism.

A smaller number of Meitei people also follow Christianity and Islam.

But an assessment prepared by Assam Rifles officials in Manipur highlighted a different set of factors that are unique to the conflict in Manipur.

The Reporters' Collective (TRC) reviewed the assessment, made in a PowerPoint presentation, late in 2023. The officers who showed the presentation wished to remain anonymous. They took me through the presentation, which was in sync with the views one of the officers shared with me while explaining the reasons behind the Manipur conflict.

The presentation put part of the blame on the state government, headed by Chief Minister N Biren Singh, and his "political authoritarianism and ambition".

It highlighted the impact of "illegal immigrants" from neighbouring Myanmar, the consequent demand for a national register of citizens to reduce migration and the demand for Kukiland.

Kukiland is a separate administrative unit that the political and armed Kuki leadership wants cleaved out of Manipur. The demand for Kukiland has been revived during the ethnic conflict.

The Chief Minister's role

The immediate trigger for the violence was a demand by the dominant Meitei community for Scheduled Tribe status, a form of affirmative action granting quotas of government jobs and college admissions. It was opposed by other tribal groups, including those from the Kuki-Zo community.

But in the presentation, Assam Rifles officials pointed to policies of the chief minister that they believed fed the animosity between the communities. It noted Singh's "hard stance" on the "war on drugs" and "vocal social media dissent", among other things, for inflaming the conflict.

The presentation accused Singh of creating divisions between communities in the state's campaign to stop drugs from being manufactured, traded and sold in Manipur. His forceful drive against the cultivation of poppies, grown in hilly regions of the state bordering Myanmar, drove home the impression that he is targeting Kukis.

Pramot Singh was referring to an upper-caste Brahmin group that lived in Kashmir but was forced to flee in the 1990s as they faced persecution and threats of violence by Kashmiri armed groups.

The Revivalists, in contrast, see Meiteis as distinct from the rest of India with their own cultural and religious identity and an erstwhile Manipuri kingdom called Kangleipak, which was merged by coercion into India in 1949.

The initiation

The embers of the current conflict – Biren Singh's alleged political authoritarianism, hard stance on poppy cultivation, undocumented immigration, demand for Kukiland and Meitei Revivalism – have long smouldered.

But in April last year came the spark that ignited the simmering tension. This period was referred to by the Assam Rifles presentation as "initiate".

As the march was winding up in the town of Churachandpur, news spread that a tyre had been set on fire in front of the Anglo-Kuki Centenary Gate, which was built to commemorate the 1917-1919 Kuki uprising against the British.

Subsequently, a group of young people approached the gate wielding weapons. Soon, word spread, suggesting that "militants" were provoking the crowd, Outlook magazine reported. Within a couple of hours, rumours spread through the state that Kuki mobs were vandalising Meitei houses.

The second phase

According to the Assam Rifles presentation, the character of the conflict began to change at the end of May.

Again unprecedented, the government sought to achieve a truce by drawing up an ethnic boundary, calling it a buffer zone, dividing the Kuki-Zo from Meitei-dominated areas and enforcing this boundary through its armed forces.

About 170 men from 165 households had been taking round-the-clock shifts to stand guard at 10 bunkers set up on the periphery of the village.

In early June, the villagers were approached by Meitei fighters. "They came forward to help us, but we didn't allow them. We are afraid that later they will take advantage of us," said N Bobi Singh, who had been organising the surveillance.

This is when the Assam Rifles presentation acknowledged groups of fighters from both communities got involved.

The state has a long and troubled history with more than 30 armed groups from different ethnic communities that call it home. They have fought for demands that range from separate nation-states to the creation of new states within India based on ethnic identities.

—Al Jazeera

Sydney attack victims include a mother

SYDNEY, 15 APRIL

The people killed and wounded by an assailant at a Sydney shopping mall were mostly women. A police officer shot and killed the man who had attacked people at the busy Westfield Bondi Junction mall, and his family said he had a long history of schizophrenia, lacked social skills and had a fascination with knives. Police said their investigation would include why he targeted women and avoided men during his attack. Those killed were five women and one man. Twelve people were wounded, and police said they mostly were female. Here's some information on those killed. Friends and family of 38-year-old osteopath Ashlee Good remembered her as a "beautiful mother, daughter, sister, partner, friend" and an "all-round outstanding human." *—AP*

IS-linked attackers kill at least 11 in Congo

KINSHASA, 15 APRIL

Extremist-linked rebels attacked villages in eastern Congo over the weekend, killing at least 11 people, torching vehicles and taking possessions, a local official said. The attacks occurred Saturday and were reported by the local mayor on Sunday. Allied Democratic Forces rebels with ties to the Islamic State group have long operated in the border area near Uganda. The United Nations said earlier this month that almost 200 people have been killed there this year. In one area, 11 bodies were recovered from four different places in the commune of Mulekera, according to the mayor, Ngongo Mayanga. Eastern Congo has been ravaged by conflict for decades as more than 120 armed groups fight for control of valuable mineral resources. *—AP*

PHOTO: x/BBC

Bishop stabbed during sermon in Sydney

SYDNEY, 15 APRIL

A bishop and several other people have been stabbed during a sermon in Sydney that was being streamed online, local media report. The incident reportedly happened on Monday night in Wakeley. Police responded to reports that a number of people had been stabbed but said none of their injuries were life-threatening. They added that a man had been arrested and was assisting them with their inquiries. It was not immediately clear what weapon was used in the attack, which is reported to have happened at the Christ The Good Shepherd Church. In the livestreamed video on the sermon, a man dressed in dark clothing can be seen approaching the bishop before appearing to strike him. Several other people then attempt to intervene and screams of horror can be heard. *—BBC News*

Abortions in 1st 12 weeks should be legalised in Germany

STUTTGART, 15 APRIL

Abortions in Germany should be legalised within the first 12 weeks of pregnancy, a government-appointed commission has recommended. While abortion is rarely punished, it remains illegal in Germany, except for specific circumstances including when a woman's life is in danger, or she is a victim of rape, while the prerequisite for any termination is a consultation with a state-recognised body. Advocates of a law change have welcomed the investigation into the country's legal framework, calling the law outdated and detrimental to women. Even in the cases not considered illegal, the procedure must take place within the first three months, except when there is a compelling reason to carry it out later. *—Guardian*

Iran war: World leaders urge Israel not to retaliate

Israeli military warns Palestinians not to return to N Gaza

JERUSALEM, 15 APRIL

World leaders are urging Israel not to retaliate after Iran launched an attack involving hundreds of drones, ballistic missiles and cruise missiles.

British Foreign Secretary David Cameron told the BBC on Monday the UK does not support a retaliatory strike, while French President Emmanuel Macron said Paris will try to "convince Israel that we must not respond by escalating."

The Iranian attack on Saturday, less than two weeks after a suspected Israeli strike in Syria that killed two Iranian generals in an Iranian consular building, marked the first time Iran has launched a direct military assault on Israel, despite decades of enmity dating back to the country's 1979 Islamic Revolution. An Israeli military spokesman said that 99 per cent of the drones and missiles launched by Iran were intercepted. Israel and Iran have been on a collision course throughout Israel's six-month war against Hamas militants in the Gaza Strip. The war erupted after Hamas and Islamic Jihad, two militant groups backed by Iran, carried out a devastating cross-border attack on 7 October that killed 1,200 people in Israel and kidnapped 250 others. The Health Ministry in Gaza on Monday said the bodies of 68 people killed in Israel's bombardment have been brought to hospitals in the past 24 hours. Another 94 were wounded, it said.

A surfer waits for wave while an Israeli military naval ship patrols the Mediterranean sea off the coast of Hadera, Israel *PHOTO: PTI*

Israeli military warns Palestinians not to return to N Gaza

The Israeli military renewed warnings on Monday for Palestinians in Gaza not to return to the embattled territory's north, a day after five people were killed trying to reach their homes in the war-torn area.

The military said Palestinians should stay in southern Gaza where they have been told to shelter because the north is a "dangerous combat zone," Israeli military spokesman Avichay Adraee wrote on X. On Sunday, hundreds of Palestinians sheltering in central Gaza headed north in an attempt to return to their homes. Throngs of people were seen crowding a seaside road. Hospital authorities in Gaza said five people were shot by Israeli forces while trying to head north.

Iran's attack on Israel was a 'disproportionate response': Macron

French President Emmanuel Macron said Iran's attack on Israel was a "disproportionate response" to the bombing of its consulate in the Syrian capital, Damascus. Firing a barrage of missiles and drones on Israel was an "unprecedented, very dangerous" act in the volatile Middle East, Macron said of Saturday's attacks.

Security council holds emergency meeting on Iran attack

The United Nations Security Council held an emergency meeting Sunday to discuss Iran's attack on Israel. The meeting ended without any action by the council.

"Now is the time to defuse and de-escalate," UN Secretary-General António Guterres said. "Now is the time for maximum restraint." *—AP*

MASSIVE LANDSLIDE

Rescue 1122 Emergency Department, rescue workers and locals gather to clear the rubble of a house partially damaged by landslide due to heavy rainfall in Matta, a town in Swat Valley, Pakistan *PHOTO: PTI*

Pak by-polls: 239 candidates to contest 23 vacant seats

ISLAMABAD, 15 APRIL

A total of 239 candidates will contest 23 vacant seats in both national and provincial assemblies in the upcoming by-elections on 21 April, ARY News reported, citing an official of the Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) on Sunday.

A total of 239 candidates will contest in the by elections, with 50 of them competing for vacant National Assembly seats. Notably, the first lady, Aseefa Bhutto Zardari has already been elected unopposed for NA 207, the ECP official said. He said that a total of 23 candidates were vying for the vacant seats in the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Assembly, while 154 candidates were seeking their fortunes in Punjab. In Sindh, Zubair Ahmed Junejo secured his seat unopposed on PS-80.

ARY News reported that twelve contenders are in the running for the empty seats in the Balochistan Assembly. The Commission has scheduled to commence printing the ballot papers for the by-elections upon the finalisation of candidate lists by the relevant returning officers on 30 March, he added. He stated that necessary election materials had been provided to provincial election commissioners. Additionally, district Returning Officers and Returning Officers are fulfilling their duties according to the established election schedule. *—ANI*

PHOTO: PTI

Bilawal Bhutto urges politicians to unite

Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP) Chairman Bilawal Bhutto-Zardari has proposed that all politicians should unite around a "Charter of Reconciliation" as he accused them of playing with the cash-strapped country's fate because of their egos, media reports said on Monday. Bilawal was speaking at a gathering in Sindh province to mark the 45th death anniversary of PPP founder and his grandfather, Zulfikar Ali Bhutto. *—PTI*

Bangladeshi ship seized off Somali coast is freed

MOGADISHU, 15 APRIL

A cargo vessel seized by pirates off the Somali coast has been freed along with its crew after more than a month, the European Union's maritime security force said Monday.

Operation ATALANTA said in a statement that all 23 crew members of the Bangladesh-flagged cargo carrier MV Abdullah had been released after 32 days in captivity. It was not immediately clear under what circumstances the ship was released.

Operation ATALANTA has been shadowing the vessel since shortly after it was seized 12 March in the Indian Ocean, nearly 1,100 kilometers east of Somalia's coastal capital Mogadishu. Twenty armed assailants took control of the vessel while it was going from Maputo, the capital of Mozambique, to Hamriya in the United Arab Emirates, according to Ambrey, a British maritime security company.

The ship is owned by Bangladeshi company SR Shipping Lines, a sister concern of Chattogram-based Kabir Steel and Rerolling Mill Group, company media advisor Mizanul Islam told local media in Bangladesh. Once-rampant piracy off the Somali coast diminished after a peak in 2011, but concerns about new attacks have grown in recent months. *—AP*

Britain's Prime Minister Rishi Sunak walks with the President of Rwanda Paul Kagame to their meeting in London *PHOTO: PTI*

UK's migration bill on its way to becoming law

LONDON, 15 APRIL

A key plank in the British government's plan to send some asylum-seekers on a one-way trip to Rwanda is expected to become law this week, but opponents plan new legal challenges that could keep deportation flights grounded.

A bill aimed at overcoming a UK Supreme Court block on sending migrants to Rwanda is expected to pass Parliament this week after the government overcomes efforts to water it down in the House of Lords. The Rwanda plan is key to Prime Minister Rishi Sunak's pledge to "stop the boats" bringing unauthorised migrants to the UK, and Sunak has repeatedly said the long-delayed first flights will take off by June.

It has been two years since Britain and Rwanda signed a deal that would see migrants who cross the English Channel in small boats sent to the East African country, where they would remain permanently. The plan has been challenged in the courts, and no one has yet been sent to Rwanda under an agreement that has cost the UK at least 370 million pounds (USD 470 million). In November, the UK Supreme Court ruled that the Rwanda plan was illegal because the nation wasn't a safe destination for asylum-seekers. For decades, human rights groups and governments have documented alleged repression of dissent by Rwanda's government both inside the country and abroad, as well as serious restrictions on internet freedom, assembly and expression.

In response to the ruling, Britain and Rwanda signed a treaty pledging to strengthen protections for migrants. Sunak's government argues the treaty allows it to pass a law declaring Rwanda a safe destination. The Safety of Rwanda Bill pronounces the country safe, making it harder for migrants to challenge deportation and allows the British government to ignore injunctions from the European Court of Human Rights that forbid removals. *—AP*

SINGAPORE PM TO STEP DOWN ON 15 MAY

SINGAPORE, 15 APRIL

Singapore Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong announced on Monday he will step down on 15 May after nearly 20 years of heading the government of the economically prosperous country as part of the long-planned leadership transition and will be succeeded by his deputy Lawrence Wong.

Lee is handing over the reins later than intended, due to the Covid-19 pandemic and after a hiccup in succession plans. Lee, 72, was sworn in as Singapore's third Prime Minister on 12 August, 2004. In a Facebook post, Lee said leadership transition is a significant moment for any country.

"Last November, I announced my intention to step down as Prime Minister this year. I will relinquish my role as Prime Minister on 15 May, 2024, and DPM (Deputy Prime Minister) Lawrence Wong will be sworn in as the next Prime Minister on the same day.

"For any country, a leadership transition is a significant moment. Lawrence and the 4G team (fourth generation) have worked hard to gain the people's trust, notably during the pandemic. Through the Forward Singapore exercise, they have worked with many Singaporeans to refresh our social compact and develop the national agenda for a new generation," he said.

"The 4G team are committed to keeping Singapore working well and moving ahead. These will always be top priorities for the government. I ask all Singaporeans to give Lawrence and his team your full support, and work with them to create a brighter future for Singapore," Lee said. The political succession in Singapore's ruling People's Action Party (PAP) appeared to be taking shape from 2018 when Deputy Prime Minister Heng Swee Keat was tipped to be the next Prime Minister. *—PTI*

Trump's history-making hush-money trial begins

NEW YORK, 15 APRIL

Donald Trump arrived Monday at a New York court for the start of jury selection in his hush-money trial, marking a singular moment in American history as the former president answers to criminal charges that he sought to stifle stories about his sex life.

The first trial of any former US commander-in-chief will unfold as Trump vies to reclaim the White House, creating a remarkable split-screen spectacle of the presumptive Republican nominee spending his days as a criminal defendant while also campaigning for the presidency.

After a norm-shattering presidency shadowed by years of investigations, the trial amounts to a historic courtroom reckoning for Trump, who now faces four indictments charging him with crimes ranging from hoarding classified documents to plotting to overturn an election. Yet the political stakes are less clear since a conviction would not preclude him from becoming president and because the allegations have been known for years and are seen as less grievous than the conduct behind the three other cases.

The day began with Judge Juan M Merchan denying defense requests to recuse himself from the case and to expand the questionnaire filled out by jurors. Additional legal arguments and housekeeping matters were expected before the formal start of jury selection. When it finally does begin, scores of people are due to be called into the courtroom to start the process of finding 12 jurors, plus six alternates.

Donald Trump *PHOTO: PTI*

- No matter the outcome, Trump is determined to benefit from the proceedings, presenting himself as the victim of politically motivated prosecutions designed to derail his candidacy

Trump's notoriety would make the process of picking a jury a near-herculean task in any year, but it's likely to be especially challenging now, unfolding in a closely contested presidential election in the city where Trump grew up and catapulted to celebrity status before winning the White House. No matter the outcome, Trump is determined to benefit from the proceedings, presenting himself as the victim of politically motivated prosecutions designed to derail his candidacy.

He's lambasted judges and prosecutors for years, a pattern of attacks that continued up to the moment he entered court on Monday, when he said: ""This is political persecution. This is a persecution like never before." *—AP*

NEW BOOK TODAY

Rushdie: Losing an eye upsets me daily

WASHINGTON, 15 APRIL

Sir Salman Rushdie has spoken in chilling detail to BBC about what he remembers of the attack two years ago, in which he was stabbed on stage.

The Booker Prize-winning author said his eye was left hanging down his face "like a soft-boiled egg", and that losing the eye "upsets him every day". "I remember thinking I was dying," he said.

"Fortunately, I was wrong." Salman said he is using his new book, Knife, as a way of fighting back against what happened. The attack took place at an education institute in New York state in August 2022, as he was preparing to give a lecture. He recalled how the assailant came "sprinting up the stairs" and stabbed him 12 times, including in his neck and abdomen, in an attack lasting 27 seconds. "I couldn't have fought him," the author said. "I couldn't have run away from him."

Rushdie *PHOTO: X/@BBCWorld*

- The attack took place at an education institute in New York state in August 2022, as he was preparing to give a lecture. He recalled how the assailant came "sprinting up the stairs" and stabbed him 12 times, including in his neck and abdomen, in an attack lasting 27 seconds. "I couldn't have fought him," the author said. "I couldn't have run away from him."

Salman said he fell to the floor, where he lay with "a spectacular quantity of blood" all around him. He was taken to a hospital by helicopter and spent six weeks recovering there. The Indian-born British-American author, 76, is one of the most influential writers of modern times. The attack dominated news headlines across the world.

The attack damaged Salman's liver and hands, and severed nerves in his right eye. His eye looked "very distended, swollen," he said. "It was kind of hanging out of my face, sitting on my cheek, I've said like a soft-boiled egg. And blind."

Sir Salman said losing one eye "upsets me every day". He finds he has to take greater care when walking down stairs, or crossing a road, or even when pouring water into a glass. But he considers himself lucky to have avoided brain damage. "It meant I was actually still able to be myself." *—BBC News*

Honda commences work on new warehouse in K'taka

NEW DELHI, 15 APRIL

Japanese firm Honda on Monday said it has commenced work for a spare parts warehouse facility in Doddaballapura near Bengaluru, Karnataka. Managed by Honda Cars India, the new facility will support the spare parts operations for all Honda businesses, including Honda Cars India, Honda Motorcycle & Scooter India, and Honda India Power Products, the company said in a statement. The upcoming facility, which will be operational by the first quarter of FY26, will play an important role in the faster availability of spare parts at Honda dealerships, it added. "This is in line with our commitment towards our customers for providing timely and quicker availability of spare parts for their Honda products," Honda Cars India President and CEO Takuya Tsumura stated. *—PTI*

TCS shares climb 1.5% after March quarter earnings

NEW DELHI, 15 APRIL

Shares of Tata Consultancy Services (TCS) on Monday climbed over 1.50 per cent after the IT services major reported a 9 per cent growth in net profit at Rs 12,434 crore in the January-March quarter of FY24 due to strong domestic business even as the company struggled in its key markets overseas. The stock gained 1.56 per cent to Rs 4,063 on the BSE. On the NSE, shares of the company climbed 1.56 per cent to Rs 4,064.20. Its market valuation zoomed by Rs 7,489.44 crore to Rs 14,54,832.99 crore amid rally in the stock. The company's earnings were announced post-market hours on Friday. In the entire fiscal year, the Tata Group company's net profit surged 9 per cent to Rs 45,908 crore, while the revenue went up to Rs 2,40,893 crore from Rs 2,25,458 crore a year ago. *—PTI*

Gold rises ₹300; silver jumps ₹500

NEW DELHI, 15 APRIL

Gold price rose Rs 300 to Rs 73,050 per 10 grams in the national capital on Monday in line with firm trends in the global markets, according to HDFC Securities. The precious metal had closed at Rs 72,750 per 10 grams in the previous session. Silver prices also jumped Rs 500 to Rs 85,700 per kilogram. In the previous trade, it had ended at Rs 85,200 per kilogram. "Spot gold prices (24 carats) in the Delhi markets are trading at Rs 73,050 per 10 grams, up Rs 300, taking positive cues from overseas markets," Saumil Gandhi, Senior Analyst of Commodities at HDFC Securities, said. In the international markets, spot gold at Comex was trading at USD 2,355 per ounce, up USD 12 from the previous close. Gold resumed trading on a positive note, mainly lifted by safe haven buying after the escalation in the conflict between Iran and Israel over the weekend. *—PTI*

VI allocates Rs 5,720 cr for 5G from FPO proceeds

MUMBAI, 15 APRIL

Ahead of its Rs 18,000 crore further public offer (FPO), Vodafone Idea on Monday said it expects to roll out 5G services in select pockets in 6-9 months of the issue Its Chief Executive Akshaya Moondra said roll-out of the 5G services is one of the objectives of raising the capital from the public and once the funding comes, it will start work on the rollout The 5G rollout will cover 40 per cent of the company's overall revenue base in the next 24-30 months, Moondra said, without sharing a specific target on when the rollout will happen A sum of Rs 5,720 crore has been allocated for the rollout, he said, adding that testing and vendor conversations have already begun. However, he did not specify the locations where the roll-out will happen. *—PTI*

Crisil expects RBI to initiate repo rate cuts from mid-2024

RBI kept the repo rate steady at 6.50% for 7 straight times

NEW DELHI, 15 APRIL

The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) maintained the status quo in the repo rate for the seventh time this month. The rating agency Crisil now expects the rate cut cycle to begin from mid-2024.

The repo rate is the rate of interest at which the RBI lends to other banks.

Along anticipated lines, RBI kept the policy repo rate unchanged at 6.50 per cent, the seventh time in a row.

"We expect the RBI to initiate rate cuts in mid-2024," Crisil said in a report, with a rider that weather and crude prices are key monitorables.

"Food, the pain point for inflation last year, could ease if monsoon turns normal this year, as early weather forecasts suggest," it asserted.

Repo rate is the rate of interest at which RBI lends to other banks ***PHOTO: ANI***

Given the uneven inflation trends, the monetary policy committee of the RBI is awaiting clearer signs of easing towards the 4 per cent inflation target. "Strong domestic growth momentum has provided it space to do so."

Retail inflation in India is in RBI's two-six per cent comfort level but is above the ideal 4 per cent scenario. In March, it was 4.85 per cent. Inflation has been a concern for many countries, including advanced economies, but India has largely managed to steer its inflation trajectory quite well.

Barring the latest pauses, the RBI raised the repo rate by 250 basis points cumulatively to 6.5 per cent since May 2022 in the fight against inflation.

Raising interest rates is a monetary policy instrument that typically helps suppress demand in the economy, thereby helping the inflation rate decline. On inflation, Crisil expects consumer price index (CPI)-linked inflation to soften to 4.5 per cent in the current financial year 2024-25 from an estimated 5.5 per cent previous year.

Meanwhile, RBI retained its inflation projection for 2024-25 at 4.5 per cent with Q1 at 4.9 per cent, Q2 at 3.8 per cent, Q3 at 4.6 per cent, and Q4 at 4.5 per cent. However, it noted that the outlook for inflation will largely be shaped by food price uncertainties (indications of a normal monsoon on one side while increasing incidence of climate shocks on other side). *—ANI*

Mkts dip 1% on concerns over Middle East conflict

MUMBAI, 15 APRIL

Stock markets took a beating on Monday with benchmark Sensex and Nifty tumbling over 1 per cent as escalating conflict in the Middle East and weak trends from global markets unnerved investors.

Extending losses to the second session, the 30-share BSE Sensex tanked 845.12 points or 1.14 per cent to settle at a more than two-week low of 73,399.78. During the day, it plunged 929.74 points or 1.25 per cent to 73,315.16.

The NSE Nifty declined 246.90 points or 1.10 per cent to finish at 22,272.50.

Key indices had plunged by over 1 per cent in the previous session on Friday due to profit taking by investors at record high levels. Sensex lost 1,638 points or 2.19 per cent while Nifty plunged 481 points or 2.13 per cent to slip below the 22,300 level in two straight sessions.

PHOTO: PIXABAY

Foreign fund outflows and hotter-than-expected US inflation data also played spoilsport for the markets.

Analysts said the renewed conflict in the Middle East, proposed changes in the India-Mauritius tax treaty and the hotter-than-expected US inflation proved to be major drags.

From the Sensex basket, Wipro, ICICI Bank, Bajaj Finserv, Bajaj Finance, Tata Motors, Larsen & Toubro, Tech Mahindra and HDFC Bank were the major laggards.

Nestle, Maruti and Bharti Airtel were the gainers.

In Asian markets, Seoul, Tokyo and Hong Kong settled lower while Shanghai ended in the positive territory. European markets were trading on a mixed note. Wall Street ended significantly lower on Friday.

"Geopolitical tensions and higher-than-expected US inflation impacted investor sentiment and dragged the indices to a lower note. The major casualties were the mid- and small-cap indices due to their rich valuation and expectation of moderation in earnings growth in Q4FY24.

Global oil benchmark Brent crude dipped 1.04 per cent to USD 89.51 a barrel. *—PTI*

Rupee falls 6 paise to settle at 83.44 against US dollar

MUMBAI, 15 APRIL

The rupee declined 6 paise to settle at 83.44 (provisional) against the US dollar on Monday, in line with deep losses in equity markets and an elevated dollar against major rivals overseas amid geopolitical tensions.

However, weakening crude oil prices in the international markets and positive domestic macroeconomic data restricted the rupee's fall, forex traders said.

At the interbank foreign exchange market, the local unit opened at 83.46 and traded between 83.42 and 83.47 against the greenback. On Friday, the rupee declined 7 paise to settle at 83.38 against the US dollar.

Anuj Choudhary Research Analyst, Sharekhan by BNP Paribas, said the Indian rupee weakened on a strong US dollar and a decline in domestic markets. However, the sharp downside in the rupee was contained amid upbeat domestic macroeconomic data . *—PTI*

Private equity investors have injected Rs 843 billion into the sector ***PHOTO: FREEPIK***

Asian investors' share in real estate on a surge

NEW DELHI, 15 APRIL

The share of investment in the Indian real estate sector from Asian investors surged from 15 per cent in 2019-2020 to 47 per cent in 2021-2023, a signal that confidence in the Indian market is on the rise, according to a report by Savills India, which is into real estate consulting.

While the US and Canada origin funds were primary sources in the past, there is now increased interest from Asian investors, particularly from Singapore, Japan and Hong Kong, the report titled 'Rising Opportunities: Private Equity in Indian Real Estate' said.

Private equity investors have injected USD 10.7 billion (Rs 843 billion) into the sector across nearly 100 deals from 2021 to 2023, the report asserted. *—ANI*

PHOTO: FREEPIK

GOVT RULES OUT PERMITTING SUGAR EXPORTS

NEW DELHI, 15 APRIL

The government on Monday ruled out possibility of allowing sugar exports in the current 2023-24 season ending October, the industry's persistent demand notwithstanding.

Currently, there are curbs on export of sugar for an indefinite period.

However, Indian Sugar Mills Association (ISMA) has requested the government to allow export of 10 lakh tonne of sugar in the 2023-24 season, anticipating healthy closing stock by the season-end.

"As of now, the government is not considering sugar exports although the industry has demanded," a senior food ministry official told PTI.

The country's sugar production crossed 30 million tonne till March of the ongoing 2023-24 season.

ISMA has revised net sugar production estimate for 2023-24 season to 32 million tonne. The government has estimated sugar output at 31.5-32 million tonne.

Meanwhile, the government is considering allowing sugar mills to use excess stock of B-heavy molasses for ethanol production this year. *—PTI*

Byju Raveendran to take over firm's daily ops after CEO Mohan's resignation

NEW DELHI, 15 APRIL

Founder of the edtech company Think and Learn, which owns the Byju's brand, Byju Raveendran will handle the firm's day-to-day operations following the resignation of CEO Arjun Mohan, the company said on Monday.

Following the move, the company has announced a major rejig of the business that will consolidate its business into three focused divisions -The Learning App, Online classes and Tuition centres, and Test-prep.

"The changes follow an extensive seven-month operational review and cost optimisation exercise led by outgoing BYJU'S India CEO Arjun Mohan.

Arjun Mohan ***PHOTO: FB***

This new phase will also see Byju Raveendran taking a more hands-on approach in spearheading the daily operations of the company," the company said.

Mohan will now transition to an external advisory role, lending his deep edTech expertise to the company and its founders during this transformation phase.

Over the past four years, Raveendran had focused primarily on strategic aspects such as raising capital and driving global expansion.

"With this new organisational structure and with the return of Byju Raveendran as the operational leader, BYJU'S is now well-positioned to begin its next chapter of innovation-led growth by launching at scale its new suite of AI-first products that have already received an overwhelmingly positive feedback in the pilot phase," the statement said. *—PTI*

India's wholesale inflation inches up marginally

NEW DELHI, 15 APRIL

Wholesale inflation in India, based on the Wholesale Price Index, remained in positive territory for the fifth month after remaining in the negative zone for seven months until October.

The annual rate of inflation based on all India Wholesale Price Index (WPI) numbers is 0.53 per cent (Provisional) for March 2024 (over March 2023), showed official data on Monday.

The positive rate of inflation in March 2024 is primarily due to increase in prices of food articles, electricity, crude petroleum and natural gas, machinery and equipment and other manufacturing.

Economists say a little rise in wholesale inflation is good as it typically incentivizes goods manufacturers to produce more.

In April last year, the wholesale inflation went into negative territory. Similarly, in the initial days of COVID-19, in July 2020, the WPI was reported negative.

Overall wholesale inflation was 8.39 per cent in October 2022 and has fallen since then. Notably, the wholesale price index (WPI)--based inflation had been in double digits for 18 months in a row till September 2022.

The government releases index numbers of wholesale prices on a monthly basis on the 14th of every month (or the next working day). The index numbers are compiled with data received from institutional sources and selected manufacturing units across the country. *—PTI*

PHOTO: FREEPIK

PASSENGER EV MARKET WILL HOT UP IN NEXT 3 YRS

NEW DELHI, 15 APRIL

In 2023, India's passenger vehicle sales grew 10 per cent YoY, but its electric vehicle (EV) sales nearly doubled to account for 2 per cent of the overall PV sales.

This EV surge in EV sales can be can be attributed to factors like, government incentive schemes like PLIs, infrastructure development like more EV charging points, increasing urban consumer interest, and government push to meet green target.

Now with reports of Tesla's entry in the Indian market, and its CEO Elon Musk India visit this month, experts say Indian EV market will see immense growth in next few years.

Currently Tata Motors held over two-thirds of the country's EV market, but Mahindra & Mahindra and BYD are emerging players in the Indian market.

Mahindra & Mahindra was the fastest-growing brand in 2023, followed by Build Your Dreams (BYD) and MG Motor.

BYD, with just two models in its India line-up, e6 MPV and Atto 3 SUV, grew over 1500 per cent in 2023.

BYD's recent launch of the Seal model will further enhance its presence and competitiveness in the Indian EV market. *—ANI*

REVENUE TO HIT USD 23.72B

India's travel and tourism sector poised for growth

NEW DELHI, 15 APRIL

The travel and tourism market in India is set to generate a revenue of USD 23.72 billion in 2024, with a projected annual growth rate (CAGR 2024-2028) of 9.62 per cent, according to projections by the India Brand Equity Foundation (IBEF).

This growth trajectory is expected to propel the market volume to USD 34.25 billion by 2028.

As per Invest India, India announced 100 per cent Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) in tourism-related ventures, including the development of hotels, resorts, and recreational facilities, in a move aimed at fostering growth and development in the tourism sector as of 2023.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi has been asserting that India's efforts in the tourism sector are centered on preserving its rich heritage while at the same time creating a world-class infrastructure for tourism.

The total FDI inflows in India for the fiscal year 2023-2024 stand at a USD 17.96 billion, with USD 11.54 billion attributed to FDI equity.

This announcement comes as the nation charts a course towards bolstering its tourism industry, positioning it as a major contributor to economic growth and job creation.

The tourism landscape in India is diverse, with the package holidays market emerging as the largest segment, projected to reach a market volume of USD 10.48 billion in 2024.

PHOTO: FREEPIK

By 2028, the number of users in the package holidays market is expected to soar to 64.74 million, with a user penetration rate increasing from 7.8 per cent in 2024 to 10.0 per cent in 2028.

The average revenue per user (ARPU) in this segment is forecasted to be USD 209.70 by 2028, with online sales expected to contribute 60 per cent of the total revenue in the travel and tourism market in India.

In alignment with global trends, India's tourism industry is undergoing a transformation, with a focus on promoting sustainable and eco-friendly travel options to attract travelers.

The sector is poised to make significant contributions to the country's GDP, with projections indicating that it will contribute USD 250 billion by 2030, generating employment for 137 million individuals. *—ANI*

SEEKS GLOBAL COLLABS

India to explore new tech, use of methanol as ship fuel

NEW DELHI, 15 APRIL

An Indian delegation in Singapore has sought to partner with global shipping industry to explore new technologies and the potential of using methanol and ammonia as ship fuels, a senior government official said on Monday.

The Indian delegation is here to participate in the Singapore Maritime Week, which is being attended by over 10,000 delegates from around the world.

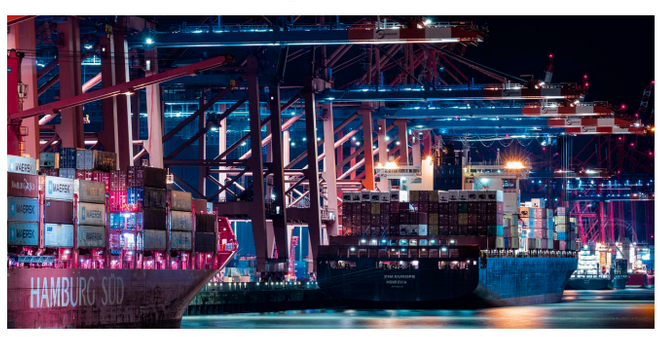
"We are here to seek out collaborations for all new technologies and explore the potential of using methanol and ammonia as ship fuels with the shipping industry stakeholders," , Joint Secretary, Ministry of Ports, Shipping and Waterways, Bhushan Kumar said on the sidelines of the event.

Methanol and ammonia are considered as cleaner alternatives to conventional maritime fuels. Green ammonia and methanol, produced from low-carbon sources, help in reducing carbon emissions.

"We have to continue working on green fuel. At this stage it may be commercially not very attractive, but we have to optimize and improve the solutions to make it commercially viable," Kumar said.

He further said that India's efforts towards hydrogen production will also help the industry in energy transition.

"India is taking a lead in green shipping," he said, adding that hydrogen production will become a reality in India by about 2027.



Methanol and ammonia are considered as cleaner alternatives to conventional maritime fuels ***PHOTO: PIXABAY***

India is setting up hydrogen centres at Kandla, Paradip and Tuticorin ports. Land at Kandla has been awarded to Reliance, L&T and Welspur Groups for setting up hydrogen centres.

He suggested ship engine manufacturers, ship owners and operators to get together to find out solutions to replace conventional fuels with green fuels. Kumar interacted with the Maritime Port Authority and Port of Singapore Authority. He also met Singapore Transport Minister Chee Hong Tat.

Kumar also gave an update on Indian government's multi-billion dollar Sagarmala projects. The project is aimed at reducing logistics costs by harnessing the country's over 7,500-km coastline, 14,500 km of potentially navigable waterways and strategic location on key international maritime trade routes. *—PTI*

RR brace for Narine spin treat as KKR eye top spot

KKR faces Rajasthan Royals in bid to dethrone table-topper

KOLKATA, 15 APRIL

Rajasthan Royals' star-studded batting will face the serious challenge of decoding Sunil Narine's mystery at Eden Gardens when they take on two-time champions Kolkata Knight Riders in a top-of-the-table IPL clash on Tuesday.

Narine, who is one month shy of turning 36, had played a pivotal role in KKR's twin triumphs under former skipper Gautam Gambhir in 2012 and 2014. Ever since joining the side way back in 2012, Narine has sizzled at Eden Gardens with his crafty bowling, proving to a big threat to opposition batters.

Now after reuniting with Gambhir, who returned to the team as their mentor, Narine dished out an allround show, reigniting their title hopes again and a win against RR will hand them the pole position in the 10-team standings ahead of the halfway stage of the season.

His 1/19 against the Sunrisers Hyderabad or 1/17 against Lucknow Super Giants may have failed to grab attention but those eight overs where he did not concede a single boundary made all the difference in the end for KKR.

KKR's only weaklink could be their skipper Shreyas Iyer's poor form with the bat.

Even though he remained unbeaten on a run-a-ball 38 in their 162-run chase against LSG, Shreyas looked tentative both against the pacers and spinners and KKR's batting may well get exposed if RR manage to give early breakthroughs. *—PTI*

Narine, who is one month shy of turning 36, had played a pivotal role in KKR's twin triumphs under former skipper Gautam Gambhir in 2012 and 2014 **PHOTO: ANI**

Absolutely ordinary captaincy: Gavaskar slams Hardik

MUMBAI, 15 APRIL

Star India all-rounder Hardik Pandya faced scathing criticism from prominent former players after Mumbai Indians' fourth loss in the ongoing IPL with the great Sunil Gavaskar slamming him for his "absolutely ordinary bowling and ordinary captaincy" so far.

Booed and heckled by fans ever since he took over MI's captaincy, Pandya found himself in the line of fire of the legendary Gavaskar and former England captain Kevin Pietersen after his team slumped to yet another defeat, this time to Chennai Super Kings, here on Sunday night.

It was the 26 runs that Pandya conceded in the final over with Mahendra Singh Dhoni going hammer and tongs, which proved to be decisive as Chennai Super Kings notched up a 20-run win over MI.

Pandya has faced fans' ire right from the first match and even at the Wankhede Stadium, boos have followed him, forcing Rohit (against Rajasthan Royals) and Virat Kohli (in MI's game against Royal Challengers Bengaluru) to ask the crowd to calm down a bit. *—PTI*

Sunil Gavaskar **PHOTO: PTI**

Candidates Chess: Gujrathi beats Nakamura again

TORONTO, 15 APRIL

Indian Grandmaster Vidit Gujrathi came back firing on all cylinders after previous match defeat and crashed through the defences of second seed Hikaru Nakamura of United States in the ninth round of the Candidates chess tournament here.

The all-Indian duel between D Gukesh and R Praggnanandhaa ended in a draw without much ado as the day saw no other decisive games. Ian Nepomniachtchi of Russia lived by the sword against Frenchman Firouza Alireza before signing peace while Nijat Abasov of Azerbaijan showed that he was almost impregnable as white and held his forte against American Fabiano Caruana.

With five rounds and two rest days still to come in the biggest event of the year, Nepomniachtchi and Gukesh continued to be joint leaders on 5.5 points out of a possible nine while Praggnanandhaa is the sole third half a point behind.

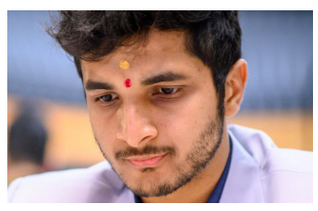
Nakamura, Gujrathi and Caruana share the fourth spot on 4.5 points and are all within string distance with Alireza on 3.5 and Abasov on three points. The Indian might have been predictable as far as the openings are concerned with either colour but clearly he knows his stuff.

Despite losing to Gukesh in the previous round, Gujrathi decided to continue with the Italian opening and got rewarded as Nakamura went for a side variation by pushing his king side pawns too early.

With a timely breakthrough in the centre, the dynamics in the position remained but Gujrathi was quick to spot a tactic missed by Nakamura. What followed was mayhem for black on the board. Nakamura called it a day when checkmate became inevitable.

Gukesh tried his hands at the Ruy Lopez as white but did not get much against Praggnanandhaa. Both the teenagers have been showing great skills here against the world's best and there was nothing to choose between them when pieces flew off the board in tandem. The game was drawn in 41 moves.

India's Koneru Humpy improved her position a bit after drawing with Kateryna Lagno of Russia while overnight joint leader Tingjie Lei was held to a draw by Nurgyul Salimova of Bulgaria. In the other game of the day, Anna Muzychuk of Ukraine played out a draw with Aleksandra Goryachkina of Russia. *—PTI*



Vidit Gujrathi beats Nakamura **PHOTO: X@TOISPORTS**

Indian Greco-Roman wrestlers have forgettable day at Asian C'ships

BISHKEK, 15 APRIL

Indian Greco-Roman wrestlers had a forgettable outing on the penultimate day of the Asian Championships with none of the five contestants on show making it to the medal rounds on Monday.

India's Arjun Halakurki (55kg), Umesh (63kg), Sajan (77kg), Ajay (87kg) and Mehar Singh (130kg) bowed out early, with none of them even making the repechage round to at least keep bronze-medal hopes alive. *—PTI*

Head, Cummins guide SRH to 25-run win against RCB

BENGALURU, 15 APRIL

Travis Head's destructive hundred fused splendidly with skipper Pat Cummins' resolve as Sunrisers Hyderabad registered a well-crafted 25-run victory over Royal Challengers Bengaluru in a high-scoring affair here on Monday.

Head's maiden T20 hundred (102, 41b, 9x4, 8x6) and Heinrich Klaasen's pillaging 67 (31b, 2x4, 7x6) drove Sunrisers to a record-breaking 287 for three, also going past their own 277/3 against Mumbai Indians at Hyderabad this 27 March.

The visiting bowlers led by Cummins (3/43) showed superb skill level on a barren pitch, something their counterparts lacked, to restrict RCB to 262 for seven. This IPL match also witnessed the highest cumulative runs scored --549 in any single T20 match.

Skipper Faf du Plessis (62, 28b, 7x4, 4x6) and the super-improvising Dinesh Karthik (83, 35b, 5x4, 7x6) played fine hands but on the night they ended as mere footnotes. However, RCB began their chase of 288 with gusto with Du Plessis and Virat Kohli (42, 20b, 6x4, 2x6) making 50 in just 3.5 overs, bettering SRH's timing for their 50 in 4.3 overs.

The Faf-Kohli pair reached 79 in the Power Play overs and 80 in 6.2 overs but the introduction of leg-spinner Mayank Markande changed the complexion of the game. *—PTI*

Travis Head during match in Bengaluru **PHOTO: PTI**

TODAY'S MATCH

KKR vs RAJASTHAN ROYALS

Time: 7.30 pm

Where To Watch: **Jio Cinema, Star Sports Network**

Stadium: Eden Gardens Kolkata

My players like pressure: Guardiola on title race

MANCHESTER, 15 APRIL

Manchester City boss Pep Guardiola believes his players are thriving under the pressure of the Premier League title race. City are two points clear at the top after their title rivals Liverpool and Arsenal both lost on Sunday. The champions thrashed Luton 5-1 a day earlier and are now favourites to win their fourth title in succession. "They like to play the pressure," the City manager said. "They like it when you are dead or alive."

Guardiola, after the Luton match, added: "That doesn't mean we are going to do it but I am pretty sure we will be there until the end because I know them, I see their faces in the meetings before games and how they prepare. Liverpool and Arsenal both suffered surprise defeats on Sunday.

Jurgen Klopp's side lost 1-0 at home to Crystal Palace while Arsenal were beaten 2-0 by fourth-placed Aston Villa at Emirates Stadium. The two-point margin separating the top three teams means it remains the tightest title race at this stage of a season since 1998-99. City move on to two decisive knockout games this week - against Real Madrid in the Champions League on Wednesday and Chelsea in the FA Cup semi-final on Sunday. *—BBC News*

City are two points clear at the top after their title rivals Liverpool and Arsenal both lost on Sunday **PHOTO: X@PLAYLINXMEDIA**

Teen Tanvi hopes to emulate Sindhu's aggression in Uber Cup

NEW DELHI, 15 APRIL

Groomed by a sports-loving mother, inspired by the peerless PV Sindhu and aspiring to be Indian badminton's aggressive is a new kid on the block. Tanvi Sharma is nothing like an average 15-year-old.

Her claim to limited fame at this point is the fact that she is the youngest member of India's women's squad for this month's Thomas and Uber Cup in Chengdu, China.

Her elder sister Radhika played the sport and her volleyball-playing mother Meera made the effort to learn the nuances of badminton coaching to teach the two girls.

Tanvi didn't take long to make an impression. She became the U-15 and U-17 national champion before finishing runner-up at the U-19 final in 2022.

Last year, she won the silver medal in the Asian U-15 Junior Championships in China, apart from winning the title in Kotak India International. She ended the year with a runner-up finish at the Senior Nationals in Guwahati.

It was also the time when she saw another teenager's life change. It was none other than her 17-year-old roommate Anmol Kharb, who earned accolades for putting up a lion-hearted show while playing the deciding third singles for India.

Tanvi, who has defeated Anmol in the past, was nursing an injury at that stage. While the injury delayed her plan to embark on the Tour, Tanvi was picked for the Uber Cup and she is looking forward to doing well at the prestigious event, starting on 27 April. *—PTI*

Tanvi Sharma became the U-15 and U-17 national champion before finishing runner-up at the U-19 final in 2022 **PHOTO: X@PLAYLINXMEDIA**

THE KING OF CLAY

'Ready enough' to play in his last Barcelona Open: Nadal

BARCELONA, 15 APRIL

Rafael Nadal is "ready enough" to play on Tuesday in what he expects to be his last Barcelona Open.

Nadal on Monday confirmed his participation in his first clay-court tournament this year. "It was a positive week of training and I'll be on the court," said Nadal, who will face Flavio Cobolli in his opening match. "It's a gift to be here. I have a feeling that it will be my last time here and I want to enjoy it."

Nadal, a 12-time champion in Barcelona, had hip surgery last summer and this year has played only three competitive matches, all in Brisbane before skipping the Australian Open. "I'm ready enough to play," Nadal said. "It is what it is right now. I have to keep going day by day."

The Spaniard said he was in a unique situation after "two tough years" of injuries and felt he can still "be competitive." The 37-year-old Nadal pulled out of last week's Monte Carlo Masters before it started because of a lingering injury, saying " my body simply won't allow me."

In early March, the 22-time Grand Slam champion played an exhibition match against Carlos Alcaraz in Las Vegas but days later pulled out of the Indian Wells tournament. Nadal is a 14-time winner at the French Open which doesn't begin until 25 May.

Alcaraz won't play in Barcelona because of an injury. Stefanos Tsitsipas, who defeated Jannik Sinner in the Monte Carlo final, has entered Barcelona. *—PTI*

RAFA NADAL **PHOTO: X@ZWXSH**

Former England spinner Underwood passes away

NEW DELHI,15 APRIL

Derek Underwood, England's best spinner in the post-World War II era, who gave a torrid time to the legendary Sunil Gavaskar, passed away at Kent on Monday. He was 78.

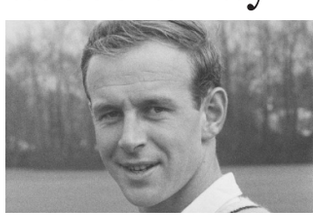
Underwood, a practitioner of slow left-arm orthodox spin, was highly regarded by his contemporaries because of his pin-point accuracy, something which made him 'Deadly' on uncovered pitches of the 60s and 70s.

The Bromley-man had numbers to match his reputation too- wickets from 86 Tests, the most by an England spinner, and in a First-Class career that spanned 24 years he took 2,465 wickets.

It was the Three Lions' first series win on these shores since their victory in the 1933-34 tour under the legendary Douglas Jardine.

Much after his playing days, Underwood, who was also a successful businessman as a retailer for roll-in pitches, also dabbled with administration, serving as the MCC president for a year in 2008.

But for an older generation, Underwood's craft will remain beautiful in execution and deadly in its effect. *—PTI*



England spin-bowling great Derek Underwood **PHOTO: X/@ ENGLAND CRICKET TWITTER**

Willie Limond: Ex-Brit champion dies at 45

LONDON, 15 APRIL

Former British and Commonwealth super-lightweight champion Willie Limond has died at the age of 45. The Glaswegian won 42 of his 48 professional fights from 1999 to 2023 - including 13 by knockout - although only three bouts took place after 2016. Four of his losses were to fighters who won world titles - Amir Khan, Anthony Crolla, Erik Morales and Ricky Burns. Limond was originally a footballer, playing five times for Albion Rovers in the late 1990s. In his distinguished boxing career he held the British super-featherweight, super-lightweight and lightweight titles as well as the Commonwealth light-welterweight, WBU lightweight and IBO Inter-Continental lightweight crowns. *—BBC News*

Rain likely to hamper Pak vs NZ T20I series

RAWALPINDI, 15 APRIL

Rain is likely to play spoilsport in the five-match T20I series between Pakistan and New Zealand. The five-match series will kick off on 18 April at Rawalpindi Cricket Stadium and all matches will be held here. On Sunday, the New Zealand team arrived in Islamabad ahead of the five-match series. Ahead of the T20 World Cup 2024, which will be played in June this year, the Kiwis and the Men in Green will look to fine-tune their squad and assess the players who could feature in the 15-player squad for the marquee event. Pakistan will be led by Babar Azam, who was recently reinstated as the skipper of the white ball format in place of Shaheen Afridi. Star pacer Mohammad Amir and all-rounder Imad Wasim, who reversed their retirements, have made sensational comebacks in cricket after being named in Pakistan's squad. *—ANI*

Paris Olympics could move to stadium: Macron

PARIS, 15 APRIL

French President Emmanuel Macron on Monday said the opening ceremony for the Paris Olympics planned on the River Seine could be shifted instead to the country's national stadium if the security threat is deemed too high. Security concerns are notably high for the exceptional opening ceremony, which involves boats carrying athletes along the Seine on a 6-kilometer (3.7-mile) parade and huge crowds watching from the embankments. Speaking to French media BFM-TV and RMC, Macron said France's law enforcement forces will be mobilized at an exceptional level for the security of the open-air event. 26 July event is set to be the first Olympic opening ceremony held outside a stadium setting. About 10,500 athletes will parade through the heart of the French capital. *—AP*

Alekna breaks men's discus throw record in 38 years

LONDON, 15 APRIL

Mykolas Alekna produced a throw of 74.35m in the discus to break the longest-standing men's world record. The Lithuanian's fifth effort at a throws meet in Ramona, Oklahoma was initially measured at 74.41m but later revised down by six cm. The new record broke that set by German Jurgen Schult, who threw 74.08m in 1986. World Athletics said, external the new mark by Alekna, 21, was subject to the usual ratification process. Alekna won silver and bronze at the 2022 and 2023 world championships respectively. His record throw dropped his father Virgilijus, who was was Olympic champion in both 2000 and 2004, down to third on the all-time list with his 73.88m in 2000. *—BBC News*